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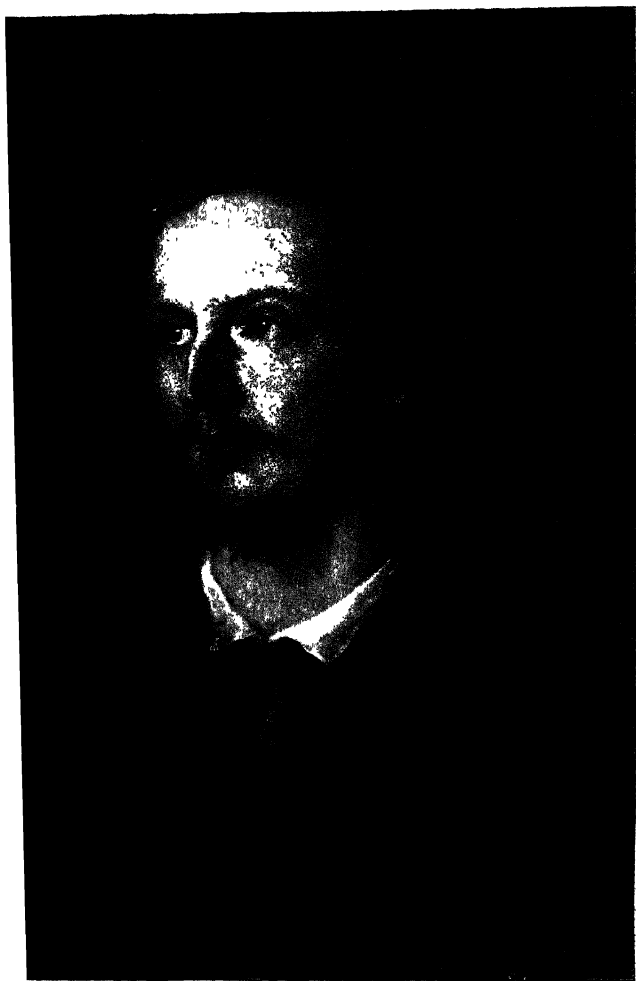
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Algernon Charles Swinburne.

THE TRAGEDIES
OF
ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE

IN FIVE VOLUMES

VOLUME V

LOCRINE
THE SISTERS
MARINO FALIERO
ROSAMUND
QUEEN OF THE LOWLANDS

LONDON
CHATTO & WINDUS
1906

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LOCRINE

A TRAGEDY

DEDICATION

TO ALICE SWINBURNE

I

THE love that comes and goes like wind or fire
Hath words and wings wherewith to speak and flee.
But love more deep than passion's deep desire,
Clear and inviolable as the unsounded sea,
What wings of words may serve to set it free,
To lift and lead it homeward? Time and death
Are less than love : or man's live spirit saith
False, when he deems his life is more than breath.

II

No words may utter love ; no sovereign song
Speak all it would for love's sake. Yet would I
Fain cast in moulded rhymes that do me wrong
Some little part of all my love : but why
Should weak and wingless words be fain to fly?
For us the years that live not are not dead :
Past days and present in our hearts are wed :
My song can say no more than love hath said.

III

Love needs nor song nor speech to say what love
 Would speak or sing, were speech and song not
 weak
To bear the sense-belated soul above
 And bid the lips of silence breathe and speak.
Nor power nor will has love to find or seek
Words indiscoverable, ampler strains of song
Than ever hailed him fair or showed him strong :
And less than these should do him worse than wrong.

IV

We who remember not a day wherein
 We have not loved each other,—who can see
No time, since time bade first our days begin,
 Within the sweep of memory's wings, when we
 Have known not what each other's love must be,—
We are well content to know it, and rest on this,
And call not words to witness that it is.
To love aloud is oft to love amiss.

V

But if the gracious witness borne of words
 Take not from speechless love the secret grace
That binds it round with silence, and engirds
 Its heart with memories fair as heaven's own face,
 Let love take courage for a little space
To speak and be rebuked not of the soul,
Whose utterance, ere the unwitting speech be whole,
Rebukes itself, and craves again control.

VI

A ninefold garland wrought of song-flowers nine
Wound each with each in chance-inwoven accord
Here at your feet I lay as on a shrine
Whereof the holiest love that lives is lord.
With faint strange hues their leaves are freaked
and scored :
The fable-flowering land wherein they grew
Hath dreams for stars, and grey romance for dew :
Perchance no flower thence plucked may flower anew.

VII

No part have these wan legends in the sun
Whose glory lightens Greece and gleams on Rome.
Their elders live : but these—their day is done,
Their records written of the wind in foam
Fly down the wind, and darkness takes them home.
What Homer saw, and Virgil dreamed, was truth,
And dies not, being divine : but whence, in sooth,
Might shades that never lived win deathless youth ?

VIII

The fields of fable, by the feet of faith
Untrodden, bloom not where such deep mist drives.
Dead fancy's ghost, not living fancy's wraith,
Is now the storied sorrow that survives
Faith in the record of these lifeless lives.
Yet Milton's sacred feet have lingered there,
His lips have made august the fabulous air,
His hands have touched and left the wild weeds fair.

IX

So, in some void and thought-untrammelled hour,
Let these find grace, my sister, in your sight,
Whose glance but cast on casual things hath power
To do the sun's work, bidding all be bright
With comfort given of love : for love is light.
Were all the world of song made mine to give,
The best were yours of all its flowers that live :
Though least of all be this my gift, forgive.

July 1887.

PERSONS REPRESENTED

LOCRINE, *King of Britain.*

CAMBER, *King of Wales, brother to LOCRINE.*

MADAN, *son to LOCRINE and GUENDOLEN.*

DEBON, *Lord Chamberlain.*

GUENDOLEN, *Queen of Britain, cousin and wife to
LOCRINE.*

ESTRILD, *a German princess, widow of the Scythian
king HUMBER.*

SABRINA, *daughter to LOCRINE and ESTRILD.*

Scene, BRITAIN.

ACT I

SCENE I. *Troynovant. A Room in the Palace*

Enter GUENDOLEN and MADAN

GUENDOLEN

Child, hast thou looked upon thy grandsire dead?

MADAN

Ay.

GUENDOLEN

Then thou sawest our Britain's heart and head
Death-stricken. Seemed not there my sire to thee
More great than thine, or all men living? We
Stand shadows of the fathers we survive :
Earth bears no more nor sees such births alive.

MADAN

Why, he was great of thews—and wise, thou say'st :
Yet seems my sire to me the fairer-faced—
The kinglier and the kindlier.

GUENDOLEN

Yea, his eyes
Are liker seas that feel the summering skies
In concord of sweet colour—and his brow
Shines gentler than my father's ever : thou,
So seeing, dost well to hold thy sire so dear.

MADAN

I said not that his love sat yet so near
My heart as thine doth : rather am I thine,
Thou knowest, than his.

GUENDOLEN

Nay—rather seems Locrine
Thy sire than I thy mother.

MADAN

Wherefore ?

GUENDOLEN

Boy,
Because of all our sires who fought for Troy
Most like thy father and my lord Locrine,
I think, was Paris.

MADAN

How may man divine
Thy meaning ? Blunt am I, thou knowest, of wit ;
And scarce yet man—men tell me.

GUENDOLEN

Ask not it.

I meant not thou shouldst understand—I spake
As one that sighs, to ease her heart of ache,
And would not clothe in words her cause for sighs—
Her naked cause of sorrow.

MADAN

Wert thou wise,

Mother, thy tongue had chosen of two things one—
Silence, or speech.

GUENDOLEN

Speech had I chosen, my son,

I had wronged thee—yea, perchance I have wronged
thine ears

Too far, to say so much.

MADAN

Nay, these are tears

That gather toward thine eyelids now. Thou hast
broken

Silence—if now thy speech die down unspoken,
Thou dost me wrong indeed—but more than mine
The wrong thou dost thyself is.

GUENDOLEN

And Locrine—

Were not thy sire wronged likewise of me?

MADAN

Yea.

GUENDOLEN

Yet—I may choose yet—nothing will I say
More.

MADAN

Choose, and have thy choice ; it galls not me.

GUENDOLEN

Son, son ! thy speech is bitterer than the sea.

MADAN

Yet, were the gulfs of hell not bitterer, thine
Might match thy son's, who hast called my sire—
Locrine—

Thy lord, and lord of all this land—the king
Whose name is bright and sweet as earth in spring,
Whose love is mixed with Britain's very life
As heaven with earth at sunrise—thou, his wife,
Hast called him—and the poison of the word
Set not thy tongue on fire—I lived and heard—
Coward.

GUENDOLEN

Thou liest.

MADAN

If then thy speech rang true,
Why, now it rings not false.

GUENDOLEN

Thou art treacherous too—
His heart, thy father's very heart is thine—
O, well beseems it, meet it is, Locrine,
That liar and traitor and changeling he should be
Who, though I bare him, was begot by thee.

MADAN

How have I lied, mother? Was this the lie,
That thou didst call my father coward, and I
Heard?

GUENDOLEN

Nay—I did but liken him with one
Not all unlike him; thou, my child, his son,
Art more unlike thy father.

MADAN

Was not then,
Of all our fathers, all recorded men,
The man whose name, thou sayest, is like his name—
Paris—a sign in all men's mouths of shame?

GUENDOLEN

Nay, save when heaven would cross him in the fight,
He bare him, say the minstrels, as a knight—
Yea, like thy father.

MADAN

Shame then were it none
Though men should liken me to him?

GUENDOLEN

My son,
I had rather see thee—see thy brave bright head,
Strong limbs, clear eyes—drop here before me dead.

MADAN

If he were true man, wherefore?

GUENDOLEN

False was he ;
No coward indeed, but faithless, trothless—we
Hold therefore, as thou sayest, his princely name
Unprincely—dead in honour—quick in shame.

MADAN

And his to mine thou likenest?

GUENDOLEN

Thine? to thine?
God rather strike thy life as dark as mine
Than tarnish thus thine honour! For to me
Shameful it seems—I know not if it be—
For men to lie, and smile, and swear, and lie,
And bear the gods of heaven false witness. I
Can hold not this but shameful.

MADAN

Thou dost well.
I had liefer cast my soul alive to hell
Than play a false man false. But were he true
And I the traitor—then what heaven should do

I wot not, but myself, being once awake
Out of that treasonous trance, were fain to slake
With all my blood the fire of shame wherein
My soul should burn me living in my sin.

GUENDOLEN

Thy soul? Yea, there—how knowest thou, boy, so
well?—

The fire is lit that feeds the fires of hell.
Mine is aflame this long time now—but thine—
O, how shall God forgive thee this, Locrine,
That thou, for shame of these thy treasons done,
Hast rent the soul in sunder of thy son?

MADAN

My heart is whole yet, though thy speech be fire
Whose flame lays hold upon it. Hath my sire
Wronged thee?

GUENDOLEN

Nay, child, I lied—I did but rave—
I jested—was my face, then, sad and grave,
When most I jested with thee? Child, my brain
Is wearied, and my heart worn down with pain :
I thought awhile, for very sorrow's sake,
To play with sorrow—try thy spirit, and take
Comfort—God knows I know not what I said,
My father, whom I loved, being newly dead.

MADAN

I pray thee that thou jest with me no more
Thus.

GUENDOLEN

Dost thou now believe me ?

MADAN

No.

GUENDOLEN

I bore

A brave man when I bore thee.

MADAN

I desire

No more of laud or leasing. Hath my sire
Wronged thee ?

GUENDOLEN

Never. But wilt thou trust me now ?

MADAN

As trustful am I, mother of mine, as thou.

Enter LOCRINE

LOCRINE

The gods be good to thee ! How farest thou ?

GUENDOLEN

Well.
Heaven hath no power to hurt me more : and hell

No fire to fear. The world I dwelt in died
With my dead father. King, thy world is wide
Wherein thy soul rejoicingly puts trust :
But mine is strait, and built by death of dust.

LOCRINE

Thy sire, mine uncle, stood the sole man, then,
That held thy life up happy? Guendolen,
Hast thou nor child nor husband—or are we
Worth no remembrance more at all of thee?

GUENDOLEN

Thy speech is sweet; thine eyes are flowers that
shine :
If ever siren bare a son, Locrine,
To reign in some green island and bear sway
On shores more shining than the front of day
And cliffs whose brightness dulls the morning's
brow,
That son of sorceries and of seas art thou.

LOCRINE

Nay, now thy tongue it is that plays on men ;
And yet no siren's honey, Guendolen,
Is this fair speech, though soft as breathes the south,
Which thus I kiss to silence on thy mouth.

GUENDOLEN

Thy soul is softer than this boy's of thine :
His heart is all toward battle. Was it mine

That put such fire in his ? for none that heard
Thy flatteries—nay, I take not back the word—
A flattering lover lives my loving lord—
Could guess thine hand so great with spear or sword.

LOCRINE

What have I done for thee to mock with praise
And make the boy's eyes widen ? All my days
Are worth not all a week, if war be all,
Of his that loved no bloodless festival—
Thy sire, and sire of slaughters : this was one
Who craved no more of comfort from the sun
But light to lighten him toward battle : I
Love no such life as bids men kill or die.

GUENDOLEN

Wert thou not woman more in word than act,
Then unrevenged thy brother Albanact
Had given his blood to guard his realm and thine :
But he that slew him found thy stroke, Locrine,
Strong as thy speech is gentle.

LOCRINE

God assoil
The dead our friends and foes !

GUENDOLEN

A goodly spoil
Was that thine hand made then by Humber's banks
Of all who swelled the Scythian's riotous ranks

With storm of inland surf and surge of steel :
None there were left, if tongues ring true, to feel
The yoke of days that breathe submissive breath
More bitter than the bitterest edge of death.

LOCRINE

None.

GUENDOLEN

This was then a day of blood. I heard,
But know not whence I caught the wandering word,
Strange women were there of that outland crew,
Whom ruthlessly thy soldiers ravening slew.

LOCRINE

Nay, Scythians then had we been, worse than they.

GUENDOLEN

These that were taken, then, thou didst not slay ?

LOCRINE

I did not say we spared them.

GUENDOLEN

Slay nor spare ?

LOCRINE

How if they were not ?

GUENDOLEN

What albeit they were ?
Small hurt, meseems, my husband, had it been
Though British hands had haled a Scythian queen—
If such were found—some woman foul and fierce—
To death—or aught we hold for shame's sake worse.

LOCRINE

For shame's own sake the hand that should not fear
To take such monstrous work upon it here,
And did not wither from the wrist, should be
Hewn off ere hanging. Wolves or men are we,
That thou shouldst question this ?

GUENDOLEN

Not wolves, but men,
Surely : for beasts are loyal.

LOCRINE

Guendolen,
What irks thee ?

GUENDOLEN

Nought save grief and love ; Locrine,
A grievous love, a loving grief is mine.
Here stands my husband : there my father lies :
I know not if there live in either's eyes
More love, more life of comfort. This our son
Loves me : but is there else left living one
That loves me back as I love ?

LOCRINE

Nay, but how
Has this wild question fired thine heart?

GUENDOLEN

Not thou!

No part have I—nay, never had I part—
Our child that hears me knows it—in thine heart.
Thy sire it was that bade our hands be one
For love of mine, his brother : thou, his son,
Didst give not—no—but yield thy hand to mine,
To mine thy lips—not thee to me, Locrine.
Thy heart has dwelt far off me all these years ;
Yet have I never sought with smiles or tears
To lure or melt it meward. I have borne—
I that have borne to thee this boy—thy scorn,
Thy gentleness, thy tender words that bite
More deep than shame would, shouldst thou spurn
or smite

These limbs and lips made thine by contract—made
No wife's, no queen's—a servant's—nay, thy shade.
The shadow am I, my lord and king, of thee,
Who art spirit and substance, body and soul to me.
And now,—nay, speak not—now my sire is dead
Thou think'st to cast me crownless from thy bed
Wherein I brought thee forth a son that now
Shall perish with me, if thou wilt—and thou
Shalt live and laugh to think of us—or yet
Play faith more foul—play falser, and forget.

LOCRINE

Sharp grief has crazed thy brain. Thou knowest of
me—

GUENDOLEN

I know that nought I know, Locrine, of thee.

LOCRINE

What bids thee then revile me, knowing no cause ?

GUENDOLEN

Strong sorrow knows but sorrow's lawless laws.

LOCRINE

Yet these should turn not grief to raging fire.

GUENDOLEN

They should not, had my heart my heart's desire.

LOCRINE

Would God that love, my queen, could give thee
this !

GUENDOLEN

Thou dost not call me wife—nor call'st amiss.

LOCRINE

What name should serve to stay this fitful strife ?

GUENDOLEN

Thou dost not ill to call me not thy wife.

LOCRINE

My sister wellnigh wast thou once : and now—

GUENDOLEN

Thy sister never I : my brother thou.

LOCRINE

How shall man sound this riddle ? Read it me.

GUENDOLEN

As loves a sister, never loved I thee.

LOCRINE

Not when we played as twinborn child with child ?

GUENDOLEN

If then thou thought'st it, both were sore beguiled.

LOCRINE

I thought thee sweeter then than summer doves.

GUENDOLEN

Yet not like theirs—woe worth it !—were our loves.

LOCRINE

No—for they meet and flit again apart.

GUENDOLEN

And we live linked, inseparate—heart in heart.

LOCRINE

Is this the grief that wrings and vexes thine?

GUENDOLEN

Thy mother laughed when thou wast born, Lochrine.

LOCRINE

Did she not well? sweet laughter speaks not scorn.

GUENDOLEN

And thou didst laugh, and wept'st not, to be born.

LOCRINE

Did I then ill? didst thou, then, weep to be?

GUENDOLEN

The same star lit not thee to birth and me.

LOCRINE

Thine eyes took light, then, from the fairer star.

GUENDOLEN

Nay; thine was nigh the sun, and mine afar.

LOCRINE

Too bright was thine to need the neighbouring sun.

GUENDOLEN

Nay, all its life of light was wellnigh done.

LOCRINE

If all on thee its light and life were shed
And darkness on thy birthday struck it dead,
It died most happy, leaving life and light
More fair and full in love's more thankful sight.

GUENDOLEN

Art thou so thankful, king, for love's kind sake?
Would I were worthier thanks like these I take!
For thanks I cannot render thee again.

LOCRINE

Too heavy sits thy sorrow, Guendolen,
Upon thy spirit of life : I bid thee not
Take comfort while the fire of grief is hot
Still at thine heart, and scarce thy last keen tear
Dried : yet the gods have left thee comfort here.

GUENDOLEN

Comfort? In thee, fair cousin—or my son?

LOCRINE

What hast thou done, Madan, or left undone?
Toward thee and me thy mother's mood to-day
Seems less than loving.

MADAN

Sire, I cannot say.

LOCRINE

Enough : an hour or half an hour is more
Than wrangling words should stuff with barren store.
Comfort may'st thou bring to her, if I may none,
When all her father quickens in her son.
In Cornish warfare if thou win thee praise,
Thine shall men liken to thy grandsire's days.

GUENDOLEN

To Cornwall must he fare and fight for thee?

LOCRINE

If heart be his—and if thy will it be.

GUENDOLEN

What is my will worth more than wind or foam?

LOCRINE

Why, leave is thine to hold him here at home.

GUENDOLEN

What power is mine to speed him or to stay?

LOCRINE

None—should thy child cast love and shame away.

GUENDOLEN

Most duteous wast thou to thy sire—and mine.

LOCRINE

Yea, truly—when their bidding sealed me thine.

GUENDOLEN

Thy smile is as a flame that plays and flits.

LOCRINE

Yet at my heart thou knowest what fire there sits.

GUENDOLEN

Not love's—not love's—toward me love burns not
there.

LOCRINE

What wouldst thou have me search therein and
swear?

GUENDOLEN

Swear by the faith none seeking there may find—

LOCRINE

Then—by the faith that lives not in thy kind—

GUENDOLEN

Ay—women's faith is water. Then, by men's—

LOCRINE

Yea—by Locrine's, and not by Guendolen's—

GUENDOLEN

Swear thou didst never love me more than now.

LOCRINE

I swear it—not when first we kissed. And thou?

GUENDOLEN

I cannot give thee back thine oath again.

LOCRINE

If now love wane within thee, lived it then?

GUENDOLEN

I said not that it waned. I would not swear—

LOCRINE

That it was ever more than shadows were?

GUENDOLEN

—Thy faith and heart were aught but shadow and fire.

LOCRINE

But thou, meseems, hast loved—thy son and sire.

GUENDOLEN

And not my lord : I cross and thwart him still.

LOCRINE

Thy grief it is that wounds me—not thy will.

GUENDOLEN

Wound ? if I would, could I forsooth wound thee ?

LOCRINE

I think thou wouldst not, though thine hands were
free.

GUENDOLEN

These hands, now bound in wedlock fast to thine ?

LOCRINE

Yet were thine heart not then dislinked from mine.

GUENDOLEN

Nay, life nor death, nor love whose child is hate,
May sunder hearts made one but once by fate.
Wrath may come down as fire between them—life
May bid them yearn for death as man for wife—
Grief bid them stoop as son to father—shame
Brand them, and memory turn their pulse to flame—
Or falsehood change their blood to poisoned wine—
Yet all shall rend them not in twain, Locrine.

LOCRINE

Who knows not this ? but rather would I know
What thought distempers and distunes thy woe.
I came to wed my grief awhile to thine
For love's sake and for comfort's—

GUENDOLEN

Thou, Locrine ?

To-day thou knowest not, nor wilt learn to-morrow,
The secret sense of such a word as sorrow.
Thy spirit is soft and sweet : I well believe
Thou wouldst, but well I know thou canst not grieve.
The tears like fire, the fire that burns up tears,
The blind wild woe that seals up eyes and ears,
The sound of raging silence in the brain
That utters things unutterable for pain,
The thirst at heart that cries on death for ease,
What knows thy soul's live sense of pangs like these ?

LOCRINE

Is no love left thee then for comfort ?

GUENDOLEN

Thine ?

LOCRINE

Thy son's may serve thee, though thou mock at mine.

GUENDOLEN

Ay—when he comes again from Cornwall.

LOCRINE

Nay ;

If now his absence irk thee, bid him stay.

GUENDOLEN

I will not—yea, I would not, though I might.
Go, child : God guard and grace thine hand in fight !

MADAN

My heart shall give it grace to guard my head.

LOCRINE

Well thought, my son : but scarce of thee well said.

MADAN

No skill of speech have I : words said or sung
Help me no more than hand is helped of tongue :
Yet, would some better wit than mine, I wis,
Help mine, I fain would render thanks for this.

GUENDOLEN

Think not the boy I bare thee too much mine,
Though slack of speech and halting : I divine
Thou shalt not find him faint of heart or hand,
Come what may come against him.

LOCRINE

Nay, this land

Bears not alive, nor bare it ere we came,
Such bloodless hearts as know not fame from shame,

Or quail for hope's sake, or more faithless fear,
From truth of single-sighted manhood, here
Born and bred up to read the word aright
That sunders man from beast as day from night.
That red rank Ireland where men burn and slay
Girls, old men, children, mothers, sires, and say
These wolves and swine that skulk and strike do
 well,
As soon might know sweet heaven from ravenous
 hell.

GUENDOLEN

Ay : no such coward as crawls and licks the dust
Till blood thence licked may slake his murderous lust
And leave his tongue the suppler shall be bred,
I think, in Britain ever—if the dead
May witness for the living. Though my son
Go forth among strange tribes to battle, none
Here shall he meet within our circling seas
So much more vile than vilest men as these.
And though the folk be fierce that harbour there
As once the Scythians driven before thee were,
And though some Cornish water change its name
As Humber then for furtherance of thy fame,
And take some dead man's on it—some dead king's
Slain of our son's hand—and its watersprings
Wax red and radiant from such fire of fight
And swell as high with blood of hosts in flight—
No fiercer foe nor worthier shall he meet
Than then fell grovelling at his father's feet.
Nor, though the day run red with blood of men
As that whose hours rang round thy praises then,
Shall thy son's hand be deeper dipped therein
Than his that gat him—and that held it sin

To spill strange blood of barbarous women—wives
Or harlots—things of monstrous names and lives—
Fit spoil for swords of harsher-hearted folk ;
Nor yet, though some that dared and 'scaped the
stroke

Be fair as beasts are beauteous,—fit to make
False hearts of fools bow down for love's foul sake,
And burn up faith to ashes—shall my son
Forsake his father's ways for such an one
As whom thy soldiers slew or slew not—thou
Hast no remembrance of them left thee now.
Even therefore may we stand assured of this :
What lip soever lure his lip to kiss,
Past question—else were he nor mine nor thine—
This boy would spurn a Scythian concubine.

LOCRINE

Such peril scarce may cross or charm our son,
Though fairer women earth or heaven sees none
Than those whose breath makes mild our wild south-
west
Where now he fares not forth on amorous quest.

GUENDOLEN

Wilt thou not bless him going, and bid him speed?

LOCRINE

So be it : yet surely not in word but deed
Lives all the soul of blessing or of ban
Or wrought or won by manhood's might for man.

The gods be gracious to thee, boy, and give
Thy wish its will !

MADAN

So shall they, if I live.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II. *Gardens of the Palace*

Enter CAMBER and DEBON

CAMBER

Nay, tell not me : no smoke of lies can smother
The truth which lightens through thy lies : I see
Whose trust it is that makes a liar of thee,
And how thy falsehood, man, has faith for mother.
What, is not thine the breast wherein my brother
Seals all his heart up ? Had he put in me
Faith—but his secret has thy tongue for key,
And all his counsel opens to none other.
Thy tongue, thine eye, thy smile unlocks his trust
Who puts no trust in man.

DEBON

Sir, then were I
A traitor found more perfect fool than knave
Should I play false, or turn for gold to dust
A gem worth all the gold beneath the sky—
The diamond of the flawless faith he gave
Who sealed his trust upon me.

CAMBER

What art thou ?
Because thy beard ere mine were black was grey
Art thou the prince, and I thy man ? I say
Thou shalt not keep his counsel from me.

DEBON

Now,
Prince, may thine old born servant lift his brow
As from the dust to thine, and answer—Nay.
Nor canst thou turn this nay of mine to yea
With all the lightning of thine eyes, I trow,
Nor this my truth to treason.

CAMBER

God us aid !
Art thou not mad ? Thou knowest what whispers
crawl
About the court with serpent sound and speed,
Made out of fire and falsehood ; or if made
Not all of lies—it may be thus—not all—
Black yet no less with poison.

DEBON

Prince, indeed
I know the colour of the tongues of fire
That feed on shame to slake the thirst of hate ;
Hell-black, and hot as hell : nor age nor state
May pluck the fangs forth of their foul desire :
I that was trothplight servant to thy sire,
A king more kingly than the front of fate
That bade our lives bow down disconsolate

When death laid hold on him—for hope nor hire,
Prince, would I lie to thee : nay, what avails
Falsehood ? thou knowest I would not.

CAMBER

Why, thou art old ;
To thee could falsehood bear but fruitless fruit—
Lean grafts and sour. I think thou wouldst not.

DEBON

Wales

In such a lord lives happy : young and bold
And yet not mindless of thy sire King Brute,
Who loved his loyal servants even as they
Loved him. Yea, surely, bitter were the fruit,
Prince Camber, and the tree rotten at root
That bare it, whence my tongue should take to-day
For thee the taste of poisonous treason.

CAMBER

Nay,
What boots it though thou plight thy word to boot ?
True servant wast thou to my sire King Brute,
And Brute thy king true master to thee.

DEBON

Yea.

Troy, ere her towers dropped hurtling down in flame,
Bare not a son more noble than the sire
Whose son begat thy father. Shame it were
Beyond all record in the world of shame,
If they that hither bore in heart that fire

Which none save men of heavenly heart may bear
Had left no sign, though Troy were spoiled and
 sacked,
That heavenly was the seed they saved.

CAMBER

No sign?

Though nought my fame be,—though no praise of
 mine

Be worth men's tongues for word or thought or act—
Shall fame forget my brother Albanact,
Or how those Huns who drank his blood for wine
Poured forth their own for offering to Locrine?
Though all the soundless maze of time were tracked,
No men should man find nobler.

DEBON

Surely none.

No man loved ever more than I thy brothers,
Prince.

CAMBER

Ay—for them thy love is bright like spring,
And colder toward me than the wintering sun.
What am I less—what less am I than others,
That thus thy tongue discrowns my name of king,
Dethrones my title, disanoints my state,
And pricks me down but petty prince?

DEBON

My lord—

CAMBER

Ay? must my name among their names stand scored
Who keep my brother's door or guard his gate?
A lordling—princeling—one that stands to wait—
That lights him back to bed or serves at board.
Old man, if yet thy foundering brain record
Aught—if thou know that once my sire was great,
Then must thou know he left no less to me,
His youngest, than to those my brethren born,
Kingship.

DEBON

I know it. Your servant, sire, am I,
Who lived so long your sire's.

CAMBER

And how had he
Endured thy silence or sustained thy scorn?
Why must I know not what thou knowest of?

DEBON

Why?
Hast thou not heard, king, that a true man's trust
Is king for him of life and death? Lo crine
Hath sealed with trust my lips—nay, prince, not
mine—
His are they now.

CAMBER

Thou art wise as he, and just,
And secret. God requite thee! yea, he must,

For man shall never. If my sword here shine
Sunward—God guard that reverend head of thine !

DEBON

My blood should make thy sword the sooner rust,
And rot thy fame for ever. Strike.

CAMBER

Thou knowest
I will not. Am I Scythian born, or Greek,
That I should take thy bloodshed on my hand ?

DEBON

Nay—if thou seest me soul to soul, and showest
Mercy—

CAMBER

Thou think'st I would have slain thee ? Speak.

DEBON

Nay, then I will, for love of all this land :
Lest, if suspicion bring forth strife, and fear
Hatred, its face be withered with a curse ;
Lest the eyeless doubt of unseen ill be worse
Than very truth of evil. Thou shalt hear
Such truth as falling in a base man's ear
Should bring forth evil indeed in hearts perverse ;
But forth of thine shall truth, once known, disperse
Doubt : and dispersed, the cloud shall leave thee clear

In judgment—nor, being young, more merciless,
I think, than I toward hearts that erred and yearned,
Struck through with love and blind with fire of life
Enkindled. When the sharp and stormy stress
Of Scythian ravin round our borders burned
Eastward, and he that faced it first in strife,
King Albanact, thy brother, fought and fell,
Locrine our lord, and lordliest born of you,—
Thy chief, my prince, and mine—against them drew
With all the force our southern strengths might tell,
And by the strong mid water's seaward swell
That sunders half our Britain met and slew
The prince whose blood baptized its fame anew
And left no record of the name to dwell
Whereby men called it ere it wore his name,
Humber ; and wide on wing the carnage went
Along the drenched red fields that felt the tramp
At once of fliers and slayers with feet like flame :
But the king halted, seeing a royal tent
Reared, with its ensign crowning all the camp,
And entered—where no Scythian spoil he found,
But one fair face, the Scythian's sometime prey,
A lady's whom their ships had borne away
By force of warlike hand from German ground,
A bride and queen by violent power fast bound
To the errant helmsman of their fierce array.
And her, left lordless by that ended fray,
Our lord beholding loved, and hailed, and crowned
Queen.

CAMBER

Queen ! and what perchance of Guendolen ?
Slept she forsooth forgotten ?

DEBON

Nay, my lord
Knows that albeit their hands were precontract
By Brute your father dying, no man of men
May fasten hearts with hands in one accord.
The love our master knew not that he lacked
Fulfilled him even as heaven by dawn is filled
With fire and light that burns and blinds and leads
All men to wise or witless works or deeds,
Beholding, ere indeed he wist or willed,
Eyes that sent flame through veins that age had
chilled.

CAMBER

Thine—with that grey goat's fleece on chin, sir?
Needs
Must she be fair : thou, wrapt in age's weeds,
Whose blood, if time hath touched it not and stilled,
The sun's own fire must once have kindled,—thou
Sing praise of soft-lipped women ? doth not shame
Sting thee, to sound this minstrel's note, and gild
A girl's proud face with praises, though her brow
Were bright as dawn's ? And had her grace no name
For men to worship by ? Her name ?

DEBON

Estrild.

CAMBER

My brother is a prince of paramours—
Eyes coloured like the springtide sea, and hair
Bright as with fire of sundawn—face as fair

As mine is swart and worn with haggard hours,
Though less in years than his—such hap was ours
When chance drew forth for us the lots that were
Hid close in time's clenched hand : and now I swear,
Though his be goodlier than the stars or flowers,
I would not change this head of mine, or crown
Scarce worth a smile of his—thy lord Locrine's—
For that fair head and crown imperial ; nay,
Not were I cast by force of fortune down
Lower than the lowest lean serf that prowls and pines
And loathes for fear all hours of night and day.

DEBON

What says my lord ? how means he ?

CAMBER

Vex not thou

Thine old hoar head with care to learn of me
This. Great is time, and what he wills to be
Is here or ever proof may bring it: now,
Now is the future present. If thy vow
Constrain thee not, yet would I know of thee
One thing : this lustrous love-bird, where is she ?
What nest is hers on what green flowering bough
Deep in what wild sweet woodland ?

DEBON

Good my lord,

Have I not sinned already—flawed my faith,
To lend such ear even to such royal suit ?

CAMBER

Yea, by my kingdom hast thou—by my sword,
Yea. Now speak on.

DEBON

Yet hope—or honour—saith
I did not ill to trust the blood of Brute
Within thee. Not prince Hector's sovereign soul,
The light of all thy lineage, more abhorred
Treason than all his days did Brute my lord.
My trust shall rest not in thee less than whole.

CAMBER

Speak, then : too long thou falterest nigh the goal.

DEBON

There is a bower built fast beside a ford
In Essex, held in sure and secret ward
Of woods and walls and waters, still and sole
As love could choose for harbourage : there the king
Keeps close from all men now these seven years since
The light wherein he lives : and there hath she
Borne him a maiden child more sweet than spring.

CAMBER

A child her daughter ? there now hidden ?

DEBON

What ails thee ?

Prince,

CAMBER

Nought. This river's name?

DEBON

The Ley.

CAMBER

Nigh Leytonstone in Essex—called of old
By men thine elders Durolitum? There
Are hind and fawn couched close in one green lair?
Speak: hast thou not my faith in pawn, to hold
Fast as my brother's heart this love, untold
And undivined of all men? must I swear
Twice—I, to thee?

DEBON

But if thou set no snare,
Why shine thine eyes so sharp? I am overbold:
Sir, pardon me.

CAMBER

My sword shall split thine heart
With pardon if thou palter with me.

DEBON

Sir,

There is the place: but though thy brow be grim
As hell—I knew thee not the man thou art—
I will not bring thee to it.

CAMBER

For love of her?
Nay—better shouldst thou know my love of him.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT II

SCENE I. *The banks of the Ley**Enter ESTRILD and SABRINA*

SABRINA

But will my father come not ? not to-day,
Mother ?

ESTRILD

God help thee ! child, I cannot say.
Why this of all days yet in summer's sight ?

SABRINA

My birthday !

ESTRILD

That should bring him—if it may.

SABRINA

May should be must : he must not be away.
His faith was pledged to me as king and knight.

ESTRILD

Small fear he should not keep it—if he might.

SABRINA

Might! and a king's might his? do kings bear sway
For nought, that aught should keep him hence till
night?

Why didst thou bid God help me when I sought
To know but of his coming?

ESTRILD

Even for nought
But laughter even to think how strait a bound
Shuts in the measure of thy sight and thought
Who seest not why thy sire hath heed of aught
Save thee and me—nor wherefore men stand crowned
And girt about with empire.

SABRINA

Have they found
Such joy therein as meaner things have wrought?
Sing me the song that ripples round and round.

ESTRILD (*sings*):—

Had I wist, quoth spring to the swallow,
That earth could forget me, kissed
By summer, and lured to follow
Down ways that I know not, I,
My heart should have waxed not high:
Mid March would have seen me die,
Had I wist.

Had I wist, O spring, said the swallow,
That hope was a sunlit mist
And the faint light heart of it hollow,
Thy woods had not heard me sing,
Thy winds had not known my wing;
It had faltered ere thine did, spring,
Had I wist.

SABRINA

That song is hardly even as wise as I—
Nay, very foolishness it is. To die
In March before its life were well on wing,
Before its time and kindly season—why
Should spring be sad—before the swallows fly—
Enough to dream of such a wintry thing?
Such foolish words were more unmeet for spring
Than snow for summer when his heart is high;
And why should words be foolish when they sing?
The song-birds are not.

ESTRILD

Dost thou understand,
Child, what the birds are singing?

SABRINA

All the land
Knows that: the water tells it to the rushes
Aloud, and lower and softer to the sand:
The flower-fays, lip to lip and hand in hand,
Laugh and repeat it all till darkness hushes
Their singing with a word that falls and crushes
All song to silence down the river-strand
And where the hawthorns hearken for the thrushes.

And all the secret sense is sweet and wise
That sings through all their singing, and replies
When we would know if heaven be gay or grey
And would not open all too soon our eyes
To look perchance on no such happy skies
As sleep brings close and waking blows away.

ESTRILD

What gives thy fancy faith enough to say
This ?

SABRINA

Why, meseems the sun would hardly rise
Else, nor the world be half so glad of day.

ESTRILD

Why didst thou crave of me that song, Sabine ?

SABRINA

Because, methought, though one were king or queen
And had the world to play with, if one missed
What most were good to have, such joy, I ween,
Were woful as a song with sobs between
And well might wail for ever, ' Had I wist !'
And might my father do but as he list,
And make this day what other days have been,
I should not shut to-night mine eyes un-kissed.

ESTRILD

I wis thou wouldst not.

SABRINA

Then I would he were
No king at all, and save his golden hair
Wore on his gracious head no golden crown.
Must he be king for ever?

ESTRILD

Not if prayer
Could lift from off his heart that crown of care
And draw him toward us as with music down.

SABRINA

Not so, but upward to us. He would but frown
To hear thee talk as though the woodlands there
Were built no lordlier than the wide-walled town.
Thou knowest, when I desire of him to see
What manner of crown that wreath of towers may be
That makes its proud head shine like older Troy's,
His brows are bent even while he laughs on me
And bids me think no more thereon than he,
For flowers are serious things, but towers are toys.

ESTRILD

Ay, child; his heart was less care's throne than joy's,
Power's less than love's friend ever: and with thee
His mood that plays is blither than a boy's.

SABRINA

I would the boy would give the maid her will.

ESTRILD

Has not thine heart as mine has here its fill?

SABRINA

So have our hearts while sleeping—till they wake.

ESTRILD

Too soon is this for waking : sleep thou still.

SABRINA

Bid then the dawn sleep, and the world lie chill.

ESTRILD

This nest is warm for one small wood-dove's sake.

SABRINA

And warm the world that feels the sundawn break.

ESTRILD

But hath my fledgeling cushat here slept ill?

SABRINA

No plaint is this, but pleading, that I make.

ESTRILD

Plead not against thine own glad life : the plea
Were like a wrangling babe's that fain would be

Free from the help its hardy heart contemns,
Free from the hand that guides and guards it, free
To take its way and sprawl and stumble. See!
Have we not here enough of diadems
Hung high round portals pillared smooth with stems
More fair than marble?

SABRINA

This is but the Ley:

I fain would look upon the lordlier Thames.

ESTRILD

A very water-bird thou art : the river
So draws thee to it that, seeing, my heart-strings
 quiver
And yearn with fear lest peril teach thee fear
Too late for help or daring to deliver.

SABRINA

Nay, let the wind make willows weep and shiver :
Me shall nor wind nor water, while I hear
What goodly words saith each in other's ear.
And which is given the gift, and which the giver,
I know not, but they take and give good cheer.

ESTRILD

Howe'er this be, thou hast no heed of mine,
To take so little of this life of thine
I gave and would not see thee cast away
For childishness in childhood, though it shine
For me sole comfort, for my lord Locrine
Chief comfort in the world.

SABRINA

Nay, mother, nay,
Make me not weep with chiding : wilt thou say
I love thee not ? Hark ! see, my sire for sign !
I hear his horse.

ESTRILD

He comes !

SABRINA

He comes to-day !
[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II. *Troynovant. A Room in the Palace*

Enter GUENDOLEN *and* CAMBER

GUENDOLEN

I know not, sir, what ails you to desire
Such audience of me as I give.

CAMBER

What ails
Me, sister ? Were the heart in me no higher
Than his who heeds no more than harpers' tales
Such griefs as set a sister's heart on fire—

GUENDOLEN

Then were my brother now at rest in Wales,
And royal.

CAMBER

Am I less than royal here ?

GUENDOLEN

Even here as there alike, sir.

CAMBER

Dost thou fear

Nothing ?

GUENDOLEN

My princely cousin, not indeed
Much that might hap at word or will of thine.

CAMBER

Ay—meanest am I of my father's seed,
If men misjudge not, cousin ; and Locrine
Noblest.

GUENDOLEN

Should I gainsay their general rede,
My heart would mock me.

CAMBER

Such a spirit as mine
Being spiritless—my words heartless—mine acts
Faint shadows of Locrine's or Albanact's ?

GUENDOLEN

Nay—not so much—I said not so. Say thou
What thou wouldst have—if aught thou wouldst—
with me.

CAMBER

No man might see thine eyes and lips and brow
Who would not—what he durst not crave of thee.

GUENDOLEN

Ay, verily? And thy spirit exalts thee now
So high that these thy words fly forth so free,
And fain thine act would follow—flying above
Shame's reach and fear's? What gift may this be?
Love?
Or liking? or compassion?

CAMBER

Take not thus
Mine innocent words amiss, nor wrest awry
Their piteous purpose toward thee.

GUENDOLEN

Piteous!
Who lives so low and looks upon the sky
As would desire—who shares the sun with us
That might deserve thy pity?

CAMBER

Thou.

GUENDOLEN

Not I,
Though I were cast out hence, cast off, discrowned,
Abject, ungirt of all that guards me round,
Naked. What villainous madness, knave and king,
Is this that puts upon thy babbling tongue
Poison?

CAMBER

The truth is as a snake to sting
That breathes ill news: but where its fang hath
stung
The very pang bids health and healing spring.
God knows the grief wherewith my spirit is wrung—
The spirit of thee so scorned, so misesteemed,
So mocked with strange misprision and misdeemed
Merciless, false, unbrotherly—to take
Such task upon it as may burn thine heart
With bitterer hatred of me that I spake
What, had I held my peace and crept apart
And tamed my soul to silence for thy sake
And mercy toward the royal thing thou art,
Chance haply might have made a fiery sword
To slay thee with—slay thee, and spare thy lord.

GUENDOLEN

Worse had it done to slay my lord, and spare
Me. Wilt thou now show mercy toward me? Then
Strike with that sword mine heart through—if thou
dare.
All know thy tongue's edge deadly.

CAMBER

Guendolen,

Thou seest me like a vassal bound to bear
All bitter words that bite the hearts of men
From thee, so be it this please thy wrath. I stand
Slave of thy tongue and subject of thine hand,
And pity thee. Take, if thou wilt, my head ;
Give it my brother. Thou shalt hear me speak
First, though the soothfast word that hangs unsaid
As yet, being spoken,—albeit this hand be weak
And faint this heart, thou sayest—should strike thee
dead
Even with that rose of wrath on brow and cheek.

GUENDOLEN

I hold not thee too faint of heart to slay
Women. Say forth whate'er thou hast heart to say.

CAMBER

Silence I have not heart to keep, and see
Scorn and derision gird thee round with shame,
Not knowing what all thy serfs who mock at thee
Know, and make mirth and havoc of thy name.
Does this not move thee ?

GUENDOLEN

How should aught move me
Fallen from such tongues as falsehood finds the
same—
Such tongues as fraud or treasonous hate o'erscurfs
With leprous lust—a prince's or a serf's ?

CAMBER

That lust of the evil-speaking tongue which gives
Quick breath to deadly lies, and stings to life
The rottenness of falsehood, when it lives,
Falls dumb, and leaves the lie to bring forth strife.
The liar will say no more—his heart misgives
His knaveship—should he sunder man and wife?
Such, sister, in thy sight, it seems, am I.
Yet shalt thou take, to keep or cast it by,
The truth of shame I would not have thee hear,—
Not might I choose,—but choose I may not.

GUENDOLEN

Shame

And truth? Shame never toward thine heart came
near,
And all thy life hath hung about thy name.
Nor ever truth drew nigh the lips that fear
Whitens, and makes the blood that feeds them tame.
Speak all thou wilt—but even for shame, forsooth,
Talk not of shame—and tell me not of truth.

CAMBER

Then shalt thou hear a lie. Thy loving lord
Loves none save thee; his heart's pulse beats in
thine;
No fairer woman, captive of his sword,
Caught ever captive and subdued Locrine:
The god of lies bear witness. At the ford
Of Humber blood was never shed like wine:
Our brother Albanact lived, fought, and died,
Never: and I that swear it have not lied.

GUENDOLEN

Fairer ?

CAMBER

They say it : but what are lies to thee ?

GUENDOLEN

Art thou nor man nor woman ?

CAMBER

Nay—I trust—

Man.

GUENDOLEN

And hast heart to make thy spoil of me ?

CAMBER

Would God I might !

GUENDOLEN

Thou art made of lies and lust—
Earth's worst is all too good for such to see,
And yet thine eyes turn heavenward—as they must,
Being man's—if man be such as thou—and soil
The light they see. Thou hast made of me thy spoil,
Thy scorn, thy profit—yea, my whole soul's plunder
Is all thy trophy, thy triumphal prize
And harvest reaped of thee ; nay, trampled under
And rooted up and scattered. Yet the skies
That see thy trophies reared are full of thunder,
And heaven's high justice loves not lust and lies.

CAMBER

Ill then should fare thy lord—if heaven be just,
And lies be lies, and lawless love be lust.

GUENDOLEN

Thou liest. I know my lord and thee. Thou liest.

CAMBER

If he be true and truth be false, I lie.

GUENDOLEN

Thou art lowest of all men born—while he sits
highest.

CAMBER

Ay—while he sits. How long shall he sit high?

GUENDOLEN

If I but whisper him of thee, thou diest.

CAMBER

I fear not, if till then secure am I.

GUENDOLEN

Secure as fools are hardy live thou still.

CAMBER

While ill with good is guerdoned, good with ill.

GUENDOLEN

I have it in my mind to take thine head.
Dost thou not fear to put me thus in fear?

CAMBER

I fear nor man nor woman, quick nor dead :
And dead in spirit already stand'st thou here.

GUENDOLEN

Thou darest not swear my lord hath wronged my bed.
Thou darest but smile and mutter, lie and leer.

CAMBER

I swear no queen bore ever crown on brow
Who meeklier bore a heavier wrong than thou.

GUENDOLEN

From thee will I bear nothing. Get thee hence :
Thine eyes defile me. Get thee from my sight.

CAMBER

The gods defend thee, soul and spirit and sense,
From sense of things thou darest not read aright !
Farewell. [Exit.

GUENDOLEN

Fare thou not well, and be defence
Far from thy soul cast naked forth by night !
Hate rose from hell a liar : love came divine
From heaven : yet she that bore thee bore Locrine.
[Exit.

ACT III

SCENE I. *Troynovant. A Room in the Palace**Enter LOCRINE and DEBON*

LOCRINE

Thou knowest not what she knows or dreams of?
why

Her face is dark and wan, her lip and eye
Restless and red as fever? Hast thou kept
Faith?

DEBON

Has my master found my faith a lie
Once all these years through? have I strayed or slept
Once, when he bade me watch? what proof has leapt
At last to light against me?

LOCRINE

Surely, none.

Weep not.

DEBON

My lord's grey vassal hath not wept
Once, even since darkness covered from the sun
The woman's face—the sole sweet wifelike one—

Whose memory holds his heart yet fast : but now
Tears, were old age not poor in tears, might run
Free as the words that bid his stricken brow
Burn and bow down to hear them.

LOCRINE

Hast not thou
Held counsel—played the talebearer whose tales
Bear plague abroad and poison, knowing not how—
Not with my wife nor brother?

DEBON

Nought avails
Falsehood : and truth it is, the king of Wales
So plied me, sir, with force of craft and threat—

LOCRINE

That thou, whose faith swerves never, flags nor fails
Nor falters, being as stars are loyal, yet
Wast found as those that fall from heaven, forget
Their station, shoot and shudder down to death
Deep as the pit of hell? What snares were set
To take thy soul—what mist of treasonous breath
Made blind in thee the sense that quickeneth
In true men's inward eyesight, when they know
And know not how they know the word it saith,
The warning word that whispers loud or low—
I ask not : be it enough these things are so.
Thou hast played me false.

DEBON

Nay, now this long time since
We have seen the queen's face wan with wrath and
woe—

Have seen her lip writhe and her eyelid wince
To take men's homage—proof that might convince
Of grief inexpiable and insatiate shame
Her spirit in all men's judgment.

LOCRINE

But the prince—
My brother, whom thou knowest by proof, not fame,
A coward whose heart is all a flickering flame
That fain would burn and dares not—whence had he
The poison that he gave her? Speak : this came
By chance—mishap—most haplessly for thee
Who hadst my heart in thine, and madest of me
No more than might for folly's sake or fear's
Be bared for even such eyes as his to see?
Old friend that wast, I would not see thy tears,
God comfort thy dishonour !

DEBON

All these years
Have I not served thee ?

LOCRINE

Yea. So cheer thee now.

DEBON

Cheered be the traitor, whom the true man cheers ?
Nay, smite me : God can be not such as thou,
And will not damn me with forgiveness. How
Hast thou such heart, to comfort such as me ?
God's thunder were less fearful than the brow

That frowns not on thy friend found false to thee.
Thy friend—thou said'st—thy friend. Strange
friends are we.

Nay, slay me then—nay, slay me rather.

LOCRINE

Friend,
Take comfort. God's wide-reaching will shall be
Here as of old accomplished, though it blend
All good with ill that none may mar or mend.
Thy works and mine are ripples on the sea.
Take heart, I say : we know not yet their end.
[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II. *Gardens of the Palace*

Enter CAMBER and MADAN

CAMBER

Hath no man seen thee?

MADAN

Had he seen, and spoken,
His head should lose its tongue. I am far away
In Cornwall.

CAMBER

Where the front of war is broken
By the onset of thy force—the rebel fray
Shattered. Had no man—canst thou surely say?—

Knowledge betimes, to give us knowledge here—
Us babblers, tongues make quick with fraud and
fear—

That thou wast bound from Cornwall hither ?

MADAN

None,

I think, who knowing of steel and fire and cord
That they can smite and burn and strangle one
Would loose without leave of his parting lord
The tongue that else were sharper than a sword
To cut the throat it sprang from.

CAMBER

Nephew mine,

I have ever loved thee—not thy sire Locrine
More—and for very and only love of thee
Have I desired, or ever even thy mother
Beheld thee, here to know of thee and me
Which loves her best—her and thy sire my brother.

MADAN

He being away, far hence—and so none other—
Not he—should share the knowledge ?

CAMBER

Surely not

He. Knowest thou whither hence he went ?

MADAN

God wot,

No : haply toward some hidden paramour.

CAMBER

And that should set not, for thy mother's sake,
And thine, the heart in thee on fire?

MADAN

An hour

Is less than even the time wherein we take
Breath to let loose the word that fain would break,
And cannot, even for passion,—if we set
An hour against the length of life : and yet
Less in account of life should be those hours—
Should be? should be not, live not, be not known,
Not thought of, not remembered even as ours,—
Whereon the flesh or fancy bears alone
Rule that the soul repudiates for its own,
Rejects and mocks and mourns for, and reclaims
Its nature, none the ignobler for the shames
That were but shadows on it—shed but shade
And perished. If thy brother and king, my sire—

CAMBER

No king of mine is he—we are equal, weighed
Aright in state, though here his throne stand higher.

MADAN

So be it. I say, if even some earth-born fire
Have ever lured the loftiest head that earth
Sees royal, toward a charm of baser birth
And force less godlike than the sacred spell
That links with him my mother, what were this
To her or me?

CAMBER

To her no more than hell
To souls cast forth who hear all hell-fire hiss
All round them, and who feel the red worm's kiss
Shoot mortal poison through the heart that rests
Immortal : serpents suckled at her breasts,
Fire feeding on her limbs, less pain should be
Than sense of pride laid waste and love laid low,
If she be queen or woman : and to thee—

MADAN

To me that wax not woman though I know
This, what shall hap or hap not ?

CAMBER

Were it so,
It should not irk thee, she being wronged alone ;
Thy mother's bed, and not thy father's throne,
Being soiled with usurpation. Ay ? but say
That now mine uncle and her sire lies dead
And helpless now to help her, or affray
The heart wherein her ruin and thine were bred,
Not she were cast forth only from his bed,
But thou, loathed issue of a contract loathed
Since first their hands were joined not but betrothed,
Wert cast forth out of kingship ? stripped of state,
Unmade his son, unseated, unallowed,
Discrowned, disorbed, discredited—thou, but late
Prince, and of all men's throats acclaimed aloud,
Of all men's hearts accepted and avowed
Prince, now proclaimed for some sweet bastard's sake
Peasant ?

MADAN.

Thy sire was sure less man than snake,
Though mine miscall thee brother.

CAMBER.

Coward or mad ?
Which might one call thee rather, whose harsh heart
Envenoms so thy tongue toward one that had
No thought less kindly—toward even thee that art
Kindless—than best beseems a kinsman's part ?

MADAN

Lay not on me thine own foul shame, whose tongue
Would turn my blood to poison, while it stung
Thy brother's fame to death. I know my sire
As shame knows thee—and better no man knows
Aught.

CAMBER

Have thy will, then : take thy full desire :
Drink dry the draught of ruin : bid all blows
Welcome : being harsh with friends, be mild with foes,
And give shame thanks for buffets. Yet I thought—
But how should help avail where heart is nought ?

MADAN

Yet—thou didst think to help me ?

CAMBER

Kinsman, ay.
My hand had held the field beside thine own,
And all wild hills that know my rallying cry
Had poured forth war for heart's pure love alone
To help thee—wouldst thou heed me—to thy throne.

MADAN

For pure heart's love ? what wage holds love in fee ?
Might half my kingdom serve ? Nay, mock not me,
Fair uncle : should I cleave the crown in twain
And gird thy temples with the goodlier half,
Think'st thou my debt might so be paid again—
Thy sceptre made a more imperial staff
Than sways as now thy hill-folk ?

CAMBER

Dost thou laugh ?
Were this too much for kings to give and take ?
If warrior Wales do battle for thy sake,
Should I that kept thy crown for thee be held
Worth less than royal guerdon ?

MADAN

Keep thine own,
And let the loud fierce knaves thy brethren quelled
Ward off the wolves whose hides should line thy
throne,
Wert thou no coward, no recreant to the bone,
No liar in spirit and soul and heartless heart,
No slave, no traitor—nought of all thou art.
A thing like thee, made big with braggart breath,
Whose tongue shoots fire, whose promise poisons
trust,
Would cast a shieldless soldier forth to death
And wreck three realms to sate his rancorous lust
With ruin of them who have weighed and found him
dust.
Get thee to Wales : there strut in speech and swell :
And thence betimes God speed thee safe to hell.

[*Exeunt severally.*]

ACT IV

SCENE I. *The banks of the Ley**Enter LOCRINE and ESTRILD*

LOCRINE

If thou didst ever love me, love me now.
I am weary at heart of all on earth save thee.
And yet I lie : and yet I lie not. Thou—
Dost thou not think for love's sake scorn of me ?

ESTRILD

As earth of heaven : as morning of the sun.

LOCRINE

Nay, what thinks evening, whom he leaves undone ?

ESTRILD

Thou madest me queen and woman : though my life
Were taken, these thou couldst not take again,
The gifts thou gavest me. More am I than wife,
Whom, till my tyrant by thy strength were slain
And by thy love my servile shame cast out,
My naked sorrows clothed and girt about

With princelier pride than binds the brows of queens,
Thou sawest of all things least and lowest alive.
What means thy doubt?

LOCRINE

Fear knows not what it means :
And I was fearful even of clouds that drive
Across the dawn, and die—of all, of nought—
Winds whispering on the darkling ways of thought,
Sunbeams that flash like fire, and hopes like fears
That slay themselves, and live again, and die.
But in mine eyes thy light is, in mine ears
Thy music : I am thine, and more than I,
Being half of thy sweet soul.

ESTRILD

Woe worth me then !
For one requires thee wholly.

LOCRINE

Guendolen ?

ESTRILD

I said she was the fairer—and I lied not.

LOCRINE

Thou art the fairest fool alive.

ESTRILD

But she,
Being wise, exceeds me : yet, so she divide not
Thine heart, my best-beloved of liars, with me,

I care not—nor I will not care. Some part
She hath had, it may be, of thy fond false heart—
Nay, couldst thou choose? but now, though she be
fairer,

Let her take all or none : I will not be
Partaker of her perfect sway, nor sharer
With any on earth more dear or less to thee.
Nay, be not wroth : what wilt thou have me say?
That I can love thee less than she can? Nay,
Thou knowest I will not ill to her ; but she—
Would she not burn my child and me with fire
To wreak herself, who loved thee once, on thee?

LOCRINE

Thy fear is darker, child, than her desire.

ESTRILD

I fear not her at all : I would not fear
The one thing fearful to me yet, who here
Sit walled around with waters and with woods
From all things fearful but the fear of change.

LOCRINE

Fear thou not that : for nothing born eludes
Time ; and the joy were sorrowful and strange
That should endure for ever. Yea, I think
Such joy would pray for sorrow's cup to drink,
Such constancy desire an end, for mere
Long weariness of watching. Thou and I
Have all our will of life and loving here,—
A heavenlier heaven on earth : but we shall die,
And if we died not, love we might outlive
As now shall love outlive us.

ESTRILD

We?

LOCRINE

Forgive!

ESTRILD

King! and I held thee more than man!

LOCRINE

God wot,
Thou art more than I—more strong and wise:
I know
Thou couldst not live one hour if love were not.

ESTRILD

And thou?

LOCRINE

I would not. All the world were woe,
And all the day night, if the love I bear thee
Were plucked out of the life wherein I wear thee
As crown and comfort of its nights and days.

ESTRILD

Thou liest—for love's sake and for mine—and I
Lie not, who swear by thee whereon I gaze
I hold no truth so hallowed as the lie
Wherewith my love redeems me from the snare
Dark doubt had set to take me.

LOCRINE

Wilt thou swear
—By what thou wilt soever—by the sun
That sees us—by the light of all these flowers—
By this full stream whose waves we hear not run—
By all that is nor mine nor thine, but ours—
That thou didst ever doubt indeed? or dream
That doubt, whose breath bids love of love misdeem,
Were other than the child of hate and hell,
The liar first-born of falsehood?

ESTRILD

Nay—I think—
God help me!—hardly. Never? can I tell?
When half our soul and all our senses sink
From dream to dream down deathward, slain with
sleep,
How may faith hold assurance fast, or keep
Her power to cast out fear for love's sake?

LOCRINE

I
Could doubt not thee, waking or sleeping.

ESTRILD

No—
Thou art not mad. How should the sunlit sky
Betray the sun? cast out the sunshine? So
Art thou to me as light to heaven: should light
Die, were not heaven as hell and noon as night?
And wherefore should I hold more dear than life
Death? Could I live, and lack thee? Thou, O king,

Hast lands and lordships—and a royal wife—
And rule of seas that tire the seamew's wing—
And fame as far as fame can travel ; I,
What have I save this home wherein to die,
Except thou love me ? Nay, nor home were this,
No place to die or live in, were I sure
Thou didst not love me. Swear not by this kiss
That love lives longer—faith may more endure—
Than one poor kiss that passes with the breath
Of lips that gave it life at once and death.
Why shouldst thou swear, and wherefore should I
trust ?
When day shall drive not night from heaven, and
night
Shall chase not day to deathward, then shall dust
Be constant—and the stars endure the sight
Of dawn that shall not slay them.

LOCRINE

By thine eyes
—Turned stormier now than stars in bare-blown
skies
Wherethrough the wind rings menace,—I will swear
Nought : so shall fear, mistrust, and jealous hate
Lie foodless, if not fangless. Thou, so fair
That heaven might change for thee the seal of fate,
How darest thou doubt thy power on souls of men ?

ESTRILD

What vows were those that won thee Guendolen ?

LOCRINE

I sware not so to her. Thou knowest—

ESTRILD

Not I.

Thou knowest that I know nothing.

LOCRINE

Nay, I know
That nothing lives under the sweet blue sky
Worth thy sweet heeding, wouldst thou think but so,
Save love—wherewith thou seest thy world fulfilled.

ESTRILD

Ay,—would I see but with thine eyes.

LOCRINE

Estrild,

Estrild !

ESTRILD

No soft reiteration of my name
Can sing my sorrow down that comes and goes
And colours hope with fear and love with shame.
Rose hast thou called me ; were I like the rose,
Happier were I than woman : she survives
Not by one hour, like us of longer lives,
The sun she lives in and the love he gives
And takes away : but we, when love grows sere,
Live yet, while trust in love no longer lives,
Nor drink for comfort with the dying year
Death.

LOCRINE

Wouldst thou drink forgetfulness for wine
To heal thine heart of love toward me ?

ESTRILD

Locrine,

Locrine !

LOCRINE

Thou wouldst not : do not mock me then,
Saying out of evil heart, in evil jest,
Thy trust is dead to meward.

ESTRILD

King of men,
Wouldst thou, being only of all men lordliest,
Be lord of women's thoughts and loving fears?
Nay, wert thou less than lord of worlds and years,
Of stars and suns and seasons, couldst thou dream
To take such empire on thee ?

LOCRINE

Nay, not I—
No more than she there playing beside the stream
To slip within a stormier stream and die.

ESTRILD

She runs too near the brink. Sabrina !

LOCRINE

See,

Her hands are lily-laden : let them be
A flower-sweet symbol for us.

Enter SABRINA

SABRINA

Sire ! O sire,

See what fresh flowers—you knew not these before—
The spring has brought, to serve my heart's desire,
Forth of the river's barren bed ! no more
Will I rebuke these banks for sterile sloth
When spring restores the woodlands. By my troth,
I hoped not, when you came again, to bring
So large a tribute worth so full a smile.

LOCRINE

Child ! how should I to thee pay tribute ?

ESTRILD

King,

Thou hast not kissed her.

LOCRINE

Dare my lips defile
Heaven ? O my love, in sight of her and thee
I marvel how the sun should look on me
And spare to turn his beams to fire.

ESTRILD

The child

Hears, and is troubled.

SABRINA

Did I wrong, to say
'Sire' ? but you bade me say so. He is mild,
And will not chide me. Father !

ESTRILD

Hear'st thou?

LOCRINE

Yea—

I hear. I would the world beyond our sight
Were dead as worlds forgotten.

ESTRILD

Wouldst thou fright

Her?

LOCRINE

Hath all sense forsaken me? Sabrina,
Thou dost not fear me?

SABRINA

No. But when your eyes
Wax red and dark, with flaughts of fire between,
I fear them—or they fright me.

LOCRINE

Wert thou wise,
They would not. Never have I looked on thee
So.

SABRINA

Nay—I fear not what might fall on me.
Here laughs my father—here my mother smiles—
Here smiles and laughs the water—what should I
Fear?

LOCRINE

Nought more fearful than the water's wiles—
Which whoso fears not ere he fear shall die.

SABRINA

Die? and is death no less an ill than dread?
I had liefer die than be nor quick nor dead.
I think there is no death but fear of death.

LOCRINE

Of death or life or anything but love
What knowest thou?

SABRINA

Less than these, my mother saith—
Less than the flowers that seeing all heaven above
Fade and wax hoar or darken, lose their trust
And leave their joy and let their glories rust
And die for fear ere winter wound them : we
Live no less glad of snowtime than of spring :
It cannot change my father's face for me
Nor turn from mine away my mother's. King
They call thee : hath thy kingship made thee less
In height of heart than we are ?

LOCRINE

No, and yes.
Here sits my heart at height of hers and thine,
Laughing for love : here not the quiring birds
Sing higher than sings my spirit : I am here Locrine,

Whom no sound vexes here of swords or words,
No cloud of thought or thunder : were my life
Crowned but as lord and sire of child and wife,
Throned but as prince of woodland, bank and bower,
My joys were then imperial, and my state
Firm as a star, that now is as a flower.

SABRINA

Thou shouldst not then—if joy grow here so great—
Part from us.

LOCRINE

No : for joy grows elsewhere scant.

SABRINA

I would fain see the towers of Troynovant.

LOCRINE

God keep thine eyes fulfilled with sweeter sights,
And this one from them ever !

SABRINA

Why? Men say
Thine halls are full of guests, princes and knights,
And lordly musters of superb array ;
Why are we thence alone, and alway ?

ESTRILD

Peace,
Child : let thy babble change its note, or cease
Here ; is thy sire not wiser—by God's grace—
Than I or thou ?

LOCRINE

Wouldst thou too see fulfilled
The fear whose shadow fallen on joy's fair face
Strikes it more sad than sorrow's own? Estrild,
Wast thou then happier ere this wildwood shrine
Hid thee from homage, left thee but Locrine
For worshipper less worthy grace of thee
Than those thy sometime suppliants?

ESTRILD

Nay; my lord
Takes too much thought—if tongues ring true—for
me.

LOCRINE

Such tongues ring falser than a broken chord
Whose jar distunes the music.

ESTRILD

Wilt thou stay
But three nights here?

LOCRINE

I had need be hence to-day.

ESTRILD

Go.

SABRINA

But I bid thee tarry; what am I
That thou shouldst heed not what I bid thee?

LOCRINE

Queen

And empress more imperious and more high
And regent royaller than time hath seen
And mightier mistress of thy sire and thrall :
Yet must I go. But ere the next moon fall
Again will I grow happy.

ESTRILD

Who can say ?

LOCRINE

So much can I—except the stars combine
Unseasonably to stay me.

ESTRILD

Let them stay
The tides, the seasons rather. Love ! Locrine !
I never parted from thee, nor shall part,
Save with a fire more keen than fire at heart :
But now the pang that wrings me, soul and sense,
And turns fair day to darkness deep as hell,
Warns me, the word that seals thy parting hence—
'Farewell'—shall bid us never more fare well.

SABRINA

Lo ! she too bids thee tarry ; dost thou not
Hear ?

LOCRINE

Might I choose, small need were hers, God wot,
Or thine, to bid me tarry. When I come
Again—

SABRINA

Thou shalt not see me : I will hide
From sight of such a sire—or bow down dumb
Before him—strong and hard as he in pride—
And so thou shalt not hear me.

LOCRINE

Who can tell ?

So now say I.

ESTRILD

God keep my lord !

LOCRINE

Farewell.

[*Exeunt.*]SCENE II. *Troynovant. A Room in the Palace**Enter GUENDOLEN and MADAN*

GUENDOLEN

Come close, and look upon me. Child or man,—
I know not how to call thee, being my child,
Who know not how myself am called, nor can—
God witness—tell thee what should she be styled

Who bears the brand and burden set on her
That man hath set on me—the lands are wild
Whence late I bade thee hither, swift of spur
As he that rides to guard his mother's life ;
Thou hast found nought loathlier there, nought hate-
fuller

In all the wilds that seethe with fluctuant strife,
Than here besets thine advent. Son, if thou
Be son of mine, and I thy father's wife—

MADAN

If heaven be heaven, and God be God.

GUENDOLEN

As now

We know not if they be. Give me thine hand.
Thou hast mine eyes beneath thy father's brow,—
And therefore bears it not the traitor's brand.
Swear—But I would not bid thee swear in vain
Nor bind thee ere thine own soul understand,
Ere thine own heart be molten with my pain,
To do such work for bitter love of me
As haply, knowing my heart, thou wert not fain—
Even thou—to take upon thee—bind on thee—
Set all thy soul to do or die.

MADAN

I swear.

GUENDOLEN

And though thou sworeest not, yet the thing should be.
The burden found for me so sore to bear

Why should I lay on any hand but mine,
Or bid thine own take part therein, and wear
A father's blood upon it—here—for sign?
Ay, now thou pluck'st it forth of hers to whom
Thou swore'st and gavest it plighted. O Locrine,
Thy seed it was that sprang within my womb,
Thine, and none other—traitor born and liar,
False-faced, false-tongued—the fire of hell consume
Me, thee, and him for ever!

MADAN

Hath my sire

Wronged thee?

GUENDOLEN

Thy sire? my lord? the flower of men?
How?

MADAN

For thy tongue was tipped but now with fire—
With fire of hell—against him.

GUENDOLEN

Now, and then,
Are twain; thou knowest not women, how their
tongue
Takes fire, and straight learns patience: Guendolen
Is there no more than crownless woman, wrung
At heart with anguish, and in utterance mad
As even the meanest whom a snake hath stung
So near the heart that all the pulse it had
Grows palpitating poison. Wilt thou know
Whence?

MADAN

Could I heal it, then mine own were glad.

GUENDOLEN

What think'st thou were the bitterest wrong, the woe
Least bearable by woman, worst of all
That man might lay upon her? Nay, thou art slow :
Speak : though thou speak but folly. Silent? Call
To mind whatso thou hast ever heard of ill
Most monstrous, that should turn to fire and gall
The milk and blood of maid or mother—still
Thou shalt not find, I think, what he hath done—
What I endure, and die not. For my will
It is that holds me yet alive, O son,
Till all my wrong be wroken, here to keep
Fast watch, a living soul before the sun,
Anhungered and athirst for night and sleep,
That will not slake the ravin of her thirst
Nor quench her fire of hunger, till she reap
The harvest loved of all men, last as first—
Vengeance.

MADAN

What wrong is this he hath done thee? Words
Are edgeless weapons : live we blest or curst,
No jot the more of evil or good engirds
The life with bitterest curses compassed round
Or girt about with blessing. Hinds and herds
Wage threats and brawl and wrangle : wind and
sound
Suffice their souls for vengeance : we require
Deeds, and till place for these and time be found
Silence. What bids thee bid me slay my sire?

GUENDOLEN

I praise the gods that gave me thee : thine heart
Is none of his, no changeling's in desire,
No coward's as who begat thee : mine thou art
All, and mine only. Lend me now thine ear :
Thou knowest—

MADAN

What anguish holds thy lips apart
And strikes thee silent ? Am I bound to hear
What thou to speak art bound not ?

GUENDOLEN

How my lord,
Our lord, thy sire—the king whose throne is here
Imperial—smote and drove the wolf-like horde
That raged against us from the raging east,
And how their chief sank in the unsounded ford
He thought to traverse, till the floods increased
Against him, and he perished : and Locrine
Found in his camp for sovereign spoil to feast
The sense of power with lustier joy than wine
A woman—Dost thou mock me ?

MADAN

And a fair
Woman, if all men lie not, mother mine—
I have heard so much. And then ?

GUENDOLEN

Thou dost not dare
Mock me ?

MADAN

I know not what should make thee mad
Though this and worse, howbeit it irk thee, were.
Art thou discrowned, dethroned, disrobed, unclad
Of empire? art thou powerless, bloodless, old?
This were some hurt: but now—thou shouldst be
glad
To take this chance upon thee, and to hold
So large a lordly happiness in hand
As when my father's and thy lord's is cold
Shall leave in thine the sway of all this land.

GUENDOLEN

And thou? no she-wolf whelps upon the wold
Whose brood is like thy mother's.

MADAN

Nay—I stand
A man thy son before thee.

GUENDOLEN

And a bold
Man: is thine heart flesh, or a burning brand
Lit to burn up and turn for thee to gold
The kingship of thy sire?

MADAN

Why, blessed or banned,
We thrive alike—thou knowest it—why, but now

I said so,—scarce the glass has dropped one sand—
And thou didst smile on me—and all thy brow
Smiled.

GUENDOLEN

Thou dost love then, thou, thy mother yet—
Me, dost thou love a little? None but thou
There is to love me ; for the gods forget—
Nor shall one hear of me a prayer again ;
Yea, none of all whose thrones in heaven are set
Shall hear, nor one of all the sons of men.

MADAN

What wouldst thou have ?

GUENDOLEN

Thou knowest.

MADAN

I know not. Speak.

GUENDOLEN

Have I kept silence all this while ?

MADAN

What then ?

What boots it though thy word, thine eye, thy cheek,
Seem all one fire together, if that fire
Sink, and thy face change, and thine heart wax weak,
To hear what deed should slake thy sore desire

And satiate thee with healing? This alone—
Except thine heart be softer toward my sire
Still than a maid's who hears a wood-dove moan
And weeps for pity—this should comfort thee :
His death.

GUENDOLEN

And sight of Madan on his throne?

MADAN

What ailed thy wits, mother, to send for me?

GUENDOLEN

Yet shalt thou not go back.

MADAN

Why, what should I
Do here, where vengeance has not heart to be
And wrath dies out in weeping? Let it die—
And let me go.

GUENDOLEN

I did not bid thee spare.

MADAN

Speak then, and bid me smite.

GUENDOLEN

Thy father?

MADAN

Ay—

If thus it please my mother.

GUENDOLEN

Dost thou dare

This?

MADAN

Nay, I lust not after empire so
That for mine own hand I should haply care
To take this deed upon it : but the blow,
Thou sayest, that speeds my father forth of life,
Speeds too my mother forth of living woe
That till he dies may die not. If his wife
Set in his son's right hand the sword to slay—
No poison brewed of hell, no treasonous knife—
The sword that walks and shines and smites by day,
Not on his hand who takes the sword shall cleave
The blood that clings on hers who gives it.

GUENDOLEN

Yea—

So be it. What levies wilt thou raise, to heave
Thy father from his seat?

MADAN

Let that be nought
Of all thy care : do thou but trust—believe
Thy son's right hand no feeblér than thy thought,
If that be strong to smite—and thou shalt see
Vengeance.

GUENDOLEN

I will. But were thy musters brought
Whence now thou art come to cheer me, this should be
A sign for us of comfort.

MADAN

Dost thou fear
Signs?

GUENDOLEN

Nay, child, nay—thou art harsh as heaven to me—
I would but have of thee a word of cheer.

MADAN

I am weak in words: my tongue can match not thine,
Mother.

Voices within] The king!

GUENDOLEN

Hear'st thou?
Voices within.] The king!

MADAN

I hear.

Enter LOCRINE

LOCRINE

How fares my queen?

GUENDOLEN

Well. And this child of mine—
How he may fare concerns not thee to know?

LOCRINE

Why, well I see my boy fares well.

GUENDOLEN

Locrine,
Thou art welcome as the sun to fields of snow.

LOCRINE

But hardly would they hail the sun whose face
Dissolves them deathward. Was thy meaning so?

GUENDOLEN

Make answer for me, Madan.

LOCRINE

In thy place?
The boy's is not beside thee.

GUENDOLEN

Speak, I say.

MADAN

God guard my lord and father with his grace!

LOCRINE

Well prayed, my child.

GUENDOLEN

Children—who can but pray—
Pray better, if my sense not err, than we.
The God whom all the gods of heaven obey
Should hear them rather, seeing—as gods may see—
How pure of purpose is their perfect prayer.

LOCRINE

I think not else—the better then for me.
But ours—what manner of child is this? the hair
Buds flowerwise round his darkening lips and chin,
This hand's young hardening palm knows how to bear
The sword-hilt's poise that late I laid therein—
Ha? doth not it?

GUENDOLEN

Thine enemies know that well.

MADAN

I make no boast of battles that have been ;
But, so God help me, days unborn shall tell
What manner of heart my father gave me.

LOCRINE

Good,

I doubt thee not.

GUENDOLEN

In Cornwall they that fell
So found it, that of all their large-limbed brood
No bulk is left to brave thee.

LOCRINE

Yea, I know
Our son hath given the wolf our foes for food
And won him worthy praise from friend or foe ;
And heartier praise and trustier thanks from none,
Boy, than thy father pays thee.

GUENDOLEN

Wouldst thou show
Thy love, thy thanks, thy fatherhood in one,
Thy perfect honour—yea, thy right to stand
Crowned, and lift up thine eyes against the sun
As one so pure in heart, so clean of hand,
So loyal and so royal, none might cast
A word against thee burning like a brand,
A sound that withers honour, and makes fast
The bondage of a recreant soul to shame—
Thou shouldst, or ever an hour be overpast,
Slay him.

LOCRINE

Thou art mad.

GUENDOLEN

What, is not then thy name
Locrine? and hath this boy done ill to thee?

Hath he not won him for thy love's sake fame?
Hath he not served thee loyally? is he
So much thy son, so little son of mine,
That men might call him traitor? May they see
The brand across his brow that reddens thine?
How shouldst thou dare—how, dream—to let him
live?

Is he not loyal? art not thou Locrine?
What less than death for guerdon shouldst thou give
My son who hath done thee service? Me thou hast
given—

Who hast found me truer than falsehood can forgive—
Shame for my guerdon : yea, my heart is riven
With shame that once I loved thee.

LOCRINE

Guendolen,

A woman's wrath should rest not unforgiven
Save of the slightest of the sons of men :
And no such slight and shameful thing am I
As would not yield thee pardon.

GUENDOLEN

Slay me then.

LOCRINE

Thee, or thy son? but now thou bad'st him die.

GUENDOLEN

Thou liest : I bade thee slay him.

LOCRINE

Art thou mad

Indeed ?

GUENDOLEN

O liar, is all the world a lie ?

I bade thee, knowing thee what thou art—I bade
My lord and king and traitor slay my son—
A heartless hand that lacks the power it had
Smite one whose stroke shall leave it strengthless—
one

Whose loyal loathing of his shame in thee
Shall cast it out of eyeshot of the sun.

LOCRINE

Thou bad'st me slay him that he might—he, slay
me ?

GUENDOLEN

Thou hast said—and yet thou hast lied not.

LOCRINE

Hell's own hate
Brought never forth such fruit as thine.

GUENDOLEN

But he

Is the issue of thy love and mine, by fate
Made one to no good issue. Didst thou trust
That grief should give to men disconsolate
Comfort, and treason bring forth truth, and dust

Blossom ? What love, what reverence, what regard,
Shouldst thou desire, if God or man be just,
Of this thy son, or me more evil-starred,
Whom scorn salutes his mother ?

LOCRINE

How should scorn
Draw near thee, girt about with power for guard,
Power and good fame ? unless reproach be born
Of these thy violent vanities of mood
That fight against thine honour.

GUENDOLEN

Dost thou mourn
For that ? Too careful art thou for my good,
Too tender and too true to me and mine,
For shame to make my heart or thine his food
Or scorn lay hold upon my fame or thine.
Art thou not pure as honour's perfect heart—
Not treason-cankered like my lord Locrine,
Whose likeness shows thee fairer than thou art
And falser than thy loving care of me
Would bid my faith believe thee ?

LOCRINE

What strange part
Is this that changing passion plays in thee ?
Know'st thou me not ?

GUENDOLEN

Yea—witness heaven and hell,
And all the lights that lighten earth and sea,

And all that wrings my heart, I know thee well.
How should I love and hate and know thee not ?

LOCRINE

Thy voice is as the sound of dead love's knell.

GUENDOLEN

Long since my heart has tolled it—and forgot
All save the cause that bade the death-bell sound
And cease and bring forth silence.

LOCRINE

Is thy lot
Less fair and royal, girt with power and crowned,
Than might fulfil the loftiest heart's desire ?

GUENDOLEN

Not air but fire it is that rings me round—
Thy voice makes all my brain a wheel of fire.
Man, what have I to do with pride of power ?
Such pride perchance it was that moved my sire
To bid me wed—woe worth the woful hour !—
His brother's son, the brother's born above
Him as above me thou, the crown and flower
Of Britain, gentler-hearted than the dove
And mightier than the sunward eagle's wing :
But nought moved me save one thing only—love.

LOCRINE

I know it.

GUENDOLEN

Thou knowest? but this thou knowest not, king,
How near of kin are bitter love and hate—
Nor which of these may be the deadlier thing.

LOCRINE

What wouldst thou?

GUENDOLEN

Death. Would God my heart were great!
Then would I slay myself.

LOCRINE

I dare not fear
That heaven hath marked for thee no fairer fate.

GUENDOLEN

Ay! wilt thou slay me then—and slay me here?

LOCRINE

Mock not thy wrath and me. No hair of thine
Would I—thou knowest it—hurt; nor vex thine ear
With answering wrath more vain than fumes of wine.
I have wronged and yet not wronged thee. Whence
or when
Strange whispers rose that turned thy heart from
mine
I would not know for shame's sake, Guendolen,
And honour's that I bear thee.

GUENDOLEN

Didst thou deem

I would outlive with thee the scorn of men,
A slave enthroned beside a traitor? Seem
These eyes and lips and hands of mine a slave's
Uplift for mercy toward thee? Such a dream
Sets realms on fire, and turns their fields to graves.

LOCRINE

No dream is mine that does thee less than right :
Albeit thy words be wild as warring waves,
I know thee higher of heart than shame could smite
And queenlier than thy queenship.

GUENDOLEN

Dost thou know

What day records to day and night to night—
How he whose wrath was rained as hail or snow
On Troy's adulterous towers, when treacherous flame
Devoured them, and our fathers' roofs lay low,
And all their praise was turned to fire and shame—
All-righteous God, who herds the stars of heaven
As sheep within his sheepfold—God, whose name
Compels the wandering clouds to service, given
As surely as even the sun's is—loves or hates
Treason? He loved our sires : were they forgiven?
Their walls upreared of gods, their sevenfold gates,
Might these keep out his justice? What art thou
To make thy will more strong and sure than fate's?
Thy fate am I, that falls upon thee now.
Wilt thou not slay me yet—and slay thy son?

So shall thy fate change, and unbend the brow
That now looks mortal on thee.

LOCRINE

What is done
Lies now past help or pleading : nor would I
Plead with thee, knowing that love henceforth is
none

Nor trust between us till the day we die.
Yet, if thy name be woman,—if thine heart
Be not burnt up with fire of hell, and lie
Not wounded even to death,—albeit we part,
Let there not be between us war, but peace,
Though love may be not.

GUENDOLEN

Peace? The man thou art
Craves—and shame bids not breath within him
cease—

Craves of the woman that thou knowest I am
Peace? Ay, take hands at parting, and release
Each heart, each hand, each other : shall the lamb,
The lamb-like woman, born to cower and bleed,
Withstand his will whose choice may save or damn
Her days and nights, her word and thought and
deed—

Take heart to outdare her lord the lion? How
Should this be—if the lion's imperial seed
Lift not against his sire as brave a brow
As frowns upon his mother?—Peace be then
Between us : none may stand before thee now :
No son of thine keep faith with Guendolen.

MADAN

I have held my peace perforce, it seems, too long,
Being slower of speech than sons of meaner men.
But seeing my sire hath done my mother wrong,
My hand is hers to serve against my sire.

GUENDOLEN

And God shall make thine hand against him strong.

LOCRINE

Ay : when the hearthstead flames, the roof takes
fire.

GUENDOLEN

Woe worth his hand who set the hearth on flame !

LOCRINE

Curse not our fathers ; though thy fierce desire
Drive thine own son against his father, shame
Should rein thy tongue from speech too shameless.

GUENDOLEN

Ay !

And thou, my holy-hearted lord,—the same
Whose hand was laid in mine and bound to lie
There fast for ever if faith be found on earth—
If truth be true, and shame not wholly die—
Hast thou not made thy mockery and thy mirth,

Thy laughter and thy scorn, of shame? But we,
Thy wife by wedlock, and thy son by birth,
Who have no part in spirit and soul with thee,
Will bear no part in kingdom nor in life
With one who hath put to shame his child and me.
Thy true-born son, and I that was thy wife,
Will see thee dead or perish. Call thy men
About thee ; bid them gird their loins for strife
More dire than theirs who storm the wild wolf's den ;
For if thou dare not slay us here to-day
Thou art dead.

LOCRINE

Thou knowest I dare not, Guendolen,
Dare what the ravenous beasts whose life is prey
Dream not of doing, though drunk with bloodshed.

GUENDOLEN

No :

Thou art gentle, and beasts are honest : no such way
Lies open toward thy fearful foot : not so
Shalt thou find surety from these foes of thine.
Woe worth thee therefore ! yea, a sevenfold woe
Shall God through us rain down on thee, Locrine.
Hadst thou the heart God hath not given thee—then
Our blood might run before thy feet like wine
And wash thy way toward sin in sight of men
Smooth, soft, and safe. But if thou shed it not—
If Madan live to look on Guendolen
Living—I wot not what shall be—I wot
What shall not—thou shalt have no joy to live
More than have they for whom God's wrath grows
hot.

LOCRINE

God's grace is no such gift as thou canst give,
Queen, or withhold. Farewell.

GUENDOLEN

I dare not say

Farewell.

LOCRINE

And why?

GUENDOLEN

Thou hast not said—Forgive.

LOCRINE

I say it—I have said. Thou wilt not hear me?

GUENDOLEN

Nay.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT V

SCENE I. *Fields near the Severn*

Enter on one side LOCRINE and his army : on the other side GUENDOLEN, MADAN, and their army

LOCRINE

Stand fast, and sound a parley.

MADAN

Halt : it seems
They would have rather speech than strokes of us.

LOCRINE

This light of dawn is like an evil dream's
That comes and goes and is not. Yea, and thus
Our hope on both sides wavering dares allow
No light but fire to bid us die or live.
—Son, and my wife that was, my rebels now,
That here we stand with death to take or give
I call the sun of heaven, God's likeness wrought
On darkness, whence all spirits breathe and shine,
To witness, is no work of will or thought
Conceived or bred in brain or heart of mine.
Ye have levied wars against me, and compelled
My will unwilling and my power withheld

To strike the stroke I would not, when I might.
Will ye not yet take thought, and spare these men
Whom else the blind and burning fire of fight
Must feed upon for pasture? Guendolen,
Had I not left thee queen in Troynovant,
Though wife no more of mine, in all this land
No hand had risen, no eye had glared askant,
Against me : thine is each man's heart and hand
That burns and strikes in all this battle raised
To serve and slake thy vengeance. With my son
I plead not, seeing his praise in arms dispraised
For ever, and his deeds of truth undone
By patricidal treason. But with thee
Peace would I have, if peace again may be
Between us. Blood by wrath unnatural shed
Or spent in civic battle burns the land
Whereon it falls like fire, and brands as red
The conqueror's forehead as the warrior's hand.
I pray thee, spare this people : reign in peace
With separate honours in a several state :
As love that was hath ceased, let hatred cease :
Let not our personal cause be made the fate
That damns to death men innocent, and turns
The joy of life to darkness. Thine alone
Is all this war : to slake the flame that burns
Thus high should crown thee royal, and enthrone
Thy praise in all men's memories. If thou wilt,
Peace let there be : if not, be thine the guilt.

GUENDOLEN

Mine? Hear it, heaven,—and men, bear witness !
Mine
The treachery that hath rent our realm in twain—

Mine, mine the adulterous treason. Not Locrine,
Not he, found loyal to my love in vain,
Hath brought the civic sword and fire of strife
On British fields and homesteads, clothed with joy,
Crowned with content and comfort : I, his wife,
Have brought on Troynovant the fires of Troy.
He lifts his head before the sun of heaven
And swears it—lies, and lives. Is God's bright
sword

Broken, wherewith the gates of Troy—the seven
Strong gates that gods who built them held in
ward—

Were broken even as wattled reeds with fire ?
Son, by what name shall honour call thy sire ?

MADAN

How long shall I and all these mail-clad men
Stand and give ear, or gape and catch at flies,
While ye wage warring words that wound not ?
When

Have I been found of you so wordy-wise
That thou or he should call to counsel one
So slow of speech and wit as thou and he,
Who know my hand no sluggard, know your son ?
Till speech be clothed in iron, bid not me
Speak.

LOCRINE

Yet he speaks not ill.

GUENDOLEN

Did I not know
Mine honour perfect as thy shame, Locrine,

Now might I say, and turn to pride my woe,
Mine only were this boy, and none of thine.
But what thou mayest I may not. Where are they
Who ride not with their lord and sire to-day?
Thy secret Scythian and your changeling child,
Where hide they now their heads that lurk not
hidden

There where thy treason deemed them safe, and
smiled?

When arms were levied, and thy servants bidden
About thee to withstand the doom of men
Whose loyal angers flamed upon our side
Against thee, from thy smooth-skinned she-wolf's den
Her whelp and she sought covert unespied,
But not from thee far off. Thou hast borne them
hither

For refuge in this west that stands for thee
Against our cause, whose very name should wither
The hearts of them that hate it. Where is she?
Hath she not heart to keep thy side? or thou,
Dost thou think shame to stand beside her now
And bid her look upon thy son and wife?
Nay, she should ride at thy right hand and laugh
To see so fair a lordly field of strife
Shine for her sake, whose lips thy love bids quaff
For pledge of trustless troth the blood of men.

LOCRINE

Should I not put her in thine hand to slay?
Hell hath laid hold upon thee, Guendolen,
And turned thine heart to hell-fire. Be thy prey
Thyself, the wolfish huntress: and the blood
Rest on thine head that here shall now be spilt.

GUENDOLEN

Let it run broader than this water's flood
Swells after storm, it shall not cleanse thy guilt.
Give now the word of charge ; and God do right
Between us in the fiery courts of fight.

[*Exeunt.*]SCENE II. *The banks of the Severn**Enter ESTRILD and SABRINA*

SABRINA

When will my father come again ?

ESTRILD

God knows,

Sweet.

SABRINA

Hast thou seen how wide this water flows—
How smooth it swells and shines from brim to brim,
How fair, how full ? Nay, then thine eyes are dim.
Thou dost not weep for fear lest evil men
Or that more evil woman—Guendolen
Didst thou not call her yesternight by name ?—
Should put my father's might in arms to shame ?
What is she so to levy shameful strife
Against my sire and thee ?

ESTRILD

His wife ! his wife !

SABRINA

Why, that art thou.

ESTRILD

Woe worth me !

SABRINA

Nay, woe worth
Her wickedness ! How may the heavens and earth
Endure her ?

ESTRILD

Heaven is fire, and earth a sword,
Against us.

SABRINA

May the wife withstand her lord
And war upon him ? Nay, no wife is she—
And no true mother thou to mock at me.

ESTRILD

Yea, no true wife or mother, child, am I.
Yet, child, thou shouldst not say it—and bid me die.

SABRINA

I bid thee live and laugh at wicked foes
Even as my sire and I do. What ! ' God knows,'
Thou sayest, and yet art fearful ? Is he not
Righteous, that we should fear to take the lot

Forth of his hand that deals it? And my sire,
Kind as the sun in heaven, and strong as fire,
Hath he not God upon his side and ours,
Even all the gods and stars and all their powers?

ESTRILD

I know not. Fate at sight of thee should break
His covenant—doom grow gentle for thy sake.

SABRINA

Wherefore?

ESTRILD

Because thou knowest not wherefore. Child,
My days were darkened, and the ways were wild
Wherethrough my dark doom led me toward this end,
Ere I beheld thy sire, my lord, my friend,
My king, my stay, my saviour. Let thine hand
Lie still in mine. Thou canst not understand,
Yet would I tell thee somewhat. Ere I knew
If aught of evil or good were false or true,
If aught of life were worth our hope or fear,
There fell on me the fate that sets us here.
For in my father's kingdom oversea—

SABRINA

Thou wast not born in Britain?

ESTRILD

Woe is me,
No: happier hap had mine perchance been then.

SABRINA

And was not I? Are these all stranger men?

ESTRILD

Ay, wast thou, child—a Briton born : God give
Thy name the grace on British tongues to live !

SABRINA

Is that so good a gift of God's—to die
And leave a name alive in memory ? I
Would rather live this river's life, and be
Held of no less or more account than he.
Lo, how he lives and laughs ! and hath no name,
Thou sayest—or one forgotten even of fame
That lives on poor men's lips and falters down
To nothing. But thy father ? and his crown ?
Did he less hate the coil of it than mine,
Or love thee less—nay, then he were not thine—
Than he, my sire, loves me ?

ESTRILD

And wilt thou hear
All ? Child, my child, love born of love, more dear
Than very love was ever ! Harken then.
This plague, this fire, that hunts us—Guendolen—
Was wedded to thy sire ere I and he
Cast ever eyes on either. Woe is me !
Thou canst not dream, sweet, what my soul would say
And not affright thee.

SABRINA

Thou affright me? Nay,
Mock not. This evil woman—when he knew
Thee, this my sweet good mother, wise and true—
He cast from him and hated.

ESTRILD

Yea—and now
For that shall haply he and I and thou
Die.

SABRINA

What is death? I never saw his face
That I should fear it.

ESTRILD

Whether grief or grace
Or curse or blessing breathe from it, and give
Aught worse or better than the life we live,
I know no more than thou knowest; perchance,
Less. When we sleep, they say, or fall in trance,
We die awhile. Well spake thine innocent breath—
I think there is no death but fear of death.

SABRINA

Did I say this? but that was long ago—
Months. Now I know not—yet I think I know—
Whether I fear or fear not it. Hard by
Men fight even now—they strike and kill and die
Red-handed; nay, we hear the roar and see
The lightning of the battle: can it be

That what no soul of all these brave men fears
Should sound so fearful save in foolish ears ?
But all this while I know not where it lay,
Thy father's kingdom.

ESTRILD

Far from here away
It lies beyond the wide waste water's bound
That clasps with bitter waves this sweet land round.
Thou hast seen the great sea never, nor canst dream
How fairer far than earth's most lordly stream
It rolls its royal waters here and there,
Most glorious born of all things anywhere,
Most fateful and most godlike ; fit to make
Men love life better for the sweet sight's sake
And less fear death if death for them should be
Shrined in the sacred splendours of the sea
As God in heaven's mid mystery. Night and day
Forth of my tower-girt homestead would I stray
To gaze thereon as thou upon the bright
Soft river whence thy soul took less delight
Than mine of the outer sea, albeit I know
How great thy joy was of it. Now—for so
The high gods willed it should be—once at morn
Strange men there landing bore me thence forlorn
Across the wan wild waters in their bark,
I wist not where, through change of light and dark,
Till their fierce lord, the son of spoil and strife,
Made me by forceful marriage rites his wife.
Then sailed they toward the white and flower-sweet
strand
Whose free folk follow on thy father's hand,
And warred against him, slaying his brother : and he
Hurled all their force back hurtling toward the sea,

And slew my lord their king ; but me he gave
Grace, and received not as a wandering slave,
But one whom seeing he loved for pity : why
Should else a sad strange woman such as I
Find in his fair sight favour ? and for me
He built the bower wherein I bare him thee,
And whence but now he hath brought us westward,
here

To abide the extreme of utmost hope or fear.
And come what end may ever, death or life,
I live or die, if truth be truth, his wife ;
And none but I and thou, though day wax dim,
Though night grow strong, hath any part in him.

SABRINA

What should we fear, then ? whence might any fear
Fall on us ?

ESTRILD

Ah ! Ah me ! God answers here.

Enter LOCRINE, wounded

LOCRINE

Praised be the gods who have brought me safe—to die
Beside thee. Nay, but kneel not—rise, and fly
Ere death take hold on thee too. Bid the child
Kiss me. The ways all round are wide and wild—
Ye may win safe away. They deemed me dead—
My last friends left—who saw me fallen, and fled—
No shame is theirs—they fought to the end. But ye,
Fly : not your love can keep my life in me—
Not even the sight and sense of you so near.

SABRINA

How can we fly, father?

ESTRILD

She would not fear—
Thy very child is she—no heart less high
Than thine sustains her—and we will not fly.

LOCRINE

So shall their work be perfect. Yea, I know
Our fate is fallen upon us, and its woe.
Yet have we lacked not gladness—and this end
Is not so hard. We have had sweet life to friend,
And find not death our enemy. All men born
Die, and but few find evening one with morn
As I do, seeing the sun of all my life
Lighten my death in sight of child and wife.
I would not live again to lose that kiss,
And die some death not half so sweet as this.
[Dies.

ESTRILD

Thou thought'st to cleave in twain my life and thine?
To cast my hand away in death, Locrine?
See now if death have drawn thee far from me!
[Stabs herself.

SABRINA

Thou diest, and hast not slain me, mother?

ESTRILD

Forgive me, child ! and so may they forgive.

Thee ?

[*Dies.*]

SABRINA

O mother, canst thou die and bid me live ?

Enter GUENDOLEN, MADAN, and Soldiers

GUENDOLEN

Dead ? Ah ! my traitor with his harlot fled
Hellward ?

MADAN

Their child is left thee.

GUENDOLEN

She ! not dead ?

SABRINA

Thou hast slain my mother and sire—thou hast slain
thy lord—
Strike now, and slay me.

GUENDOLEN

Smite her with thy sword.

MADAN

I know not if I dare. I dare not.

GUENDOLEN

Shame

Consume thee !—Thou—what call they, girl, thy
name ?

Daughter of Estrild,—daughter of Locrine,—
Daughter of death and darkness !

SABRINA

Yet not thine.

Darkness and death are come on us, and thou,
Whose servants are they : heaven behind thee now
Stands, and withholds the thunder : yet on me
He gives thee not, who helps and comforts thee,
Power for one hour of darkness. Ere thine hand
Can put forth power to slay me where I stand
Safe shall I sleep as these that here lie slain.

GUENDOLEN

She dares not—though the heart in her be fain,
The flesh draws back for fear. She dares not.

SABRINA

See !

I change no more of warring words with thee.
O father, O my mother, here am I :
They hurt me not who can but bid me die.

[She leaps into the river.]

GUENDOLEN

Save her ! God pardon me !

MADAN

The water whirls
Down out of sight her tender face, and hurls
Her soft light limbs to deathward. God forgive—
Thee, sayest thou, mother? Wouldst thou bid her
live?

GUENDOLEN

What have we done?

MADAN

The work we came to do.
That God, thou said'st, should stand for judge of you
Whose judgment smote with mortal fire and sword
Troy, for such cause as bade thee slay thy lord.
Now, as between his fathers and their foes
The lord of gods dealt judgment, winged with woes
And girt about with ruin, hath he sent
On these destruction.

GUENDOLEN

Yea.

MADAN

Art thou content?

GUENDOLEN

The gods are wise who lead us—now to smite,
And now to spare : we dwell but in their sight

And work but what their will is. What hath been
Is past. But these, that once were king and queen,
The sun, that feeds on death, shall not consume
Naked. Not I would sunder tomb from tomb
Of these twain foes of mine, in death made one—
I, that when darkness hides me from the sun
Shall sleep alone, with none to rest by me.
But thou—this one time more I look on thee—
Fairface, brave hand, weak heart that wast not mine—
Sleep sound—and God be good to thee, Locrine.
I was not. She was fair as heaven in spring
Whom thou didst love indeed. Sleep, queen and king,
Forgiven ; and if—God knows—being dead, ye live,
And keep remembrance yet of me—forgive.

[*Exeunt.*

THE SISTERS

A TRAGEDY

TO THE

LADY MARY GORDON

THIS PLAY IS GRATEFULLY INSCRIBED

BY HER AFFECTIONATE NEPHEW

DEDICATION

I

BETWEEN the sea-cliffs and the sea there sleeps
A garden walled about with woodland, fair
As dreams that die or days that memory keeps
Alive in holier light and lovelier air
Than clothed them round long since and blessed
them there
With less benignant blessing, set less fast
For seal on spirit and sense, than time has cast
For all time on the dead and deathless past.

II

Beneath the trellised flowers the flowers that shine
And lighten all the lustrous length of way
From terrace up to terrace bear me sign
And keep me record how no word could say
What perfect pleasure of how pure a day
A child's remembrance or a child's delight
Drank deep in dreams of, or in present sight
Exulted as the sunrise in its might.

III

The shadowed lawns, the shadowing pines, the ways
That wind and wander through a world of flowers,
The radiant orchard where the glad sun's gaze
Dwells, and makes most of all his happiest hours,
The field that laughs beneath the cliff that towers,
The splendour of the slumber that enthralls
With sunbright peace the world within their walls,
Are symbols yet of years that love recalls.

IV

But scarce the sovereign symbol of the sea,
That clasps about the loveliest land alive
With loveliness more wonderful, may be
Fit sign to show what radiant dreams survive
Of suns that set not with the years that drive
Like mists before the blast of dawn, but still
Through clouds and gusts of change that chafe and
chill
Lift up the light that mocks their wrathful will.

V

A light unshaken of the wind of time
That laughs upon the thunder and the threat
Of years that thicken and of clouds that climb
To put the stars out that they see not set,
And bid sweet memory's rapturous faith forget.
But not the lightning shafts of change can slay
The life of light that dies not with the day,
The glad live past that cannot pass away.

VI

The many-coloured joys of dawn and noon
That lit with love a child's life and a boy's,
And kept a man's in concord and in tune
With lifelong music of memorial joys
Where thought held life and dream in equipoise,
Even now make child and boy and man seem one,
And days that dawned beneath the last year's sun
As days that even ere childhood died were done.

VII

The sun to sport in and the cliffs to scale,
The sea to clasp and wrestle with, till breath
For rapture more than weariness would fail,
All-golden gifts of dawn, whose record saith
That time nor change may turn their life to death,
Live not in loving thought alone, though there
The life they live be lovelier than they were
When clothed in present light and actual air.

VIII

Sun, moon, and stars behold the land and sea
No less than ever lovely, bright as hope
Could hover, or as happiness can be:
Fair as of old the lawns to sunward slope,
The fields to seaward slant and close and ope:
But where of old from strong and sleepless wells
The exulting fountains fed their shapely shells,
Where light once dwelt in water, dust now dwells.

IX

The springs of earth may slacken, and the sun
Find no more laughing lustre to relume
Where once the sunlight and the spring seemed one ;
But not on heart or soul may time or doom
Cast aught of drought or lower with aught of
gloom
If past and future, hope and memory, be
Ringed round about with love, fast bound and free,
As all the world is girdled with the sea.

PERSONS REPRESENTED

SIR FRANCIS DILSTON.

SIR ARTHUR CLAVERING.

FRANK DILSTON, *son to* SIR FRANCIS.

REGINALD CLAVERING, *cousin to* SIR ARTHUR.

ANNE DILSTON	} <i>twin-sisters and coheiresses, formerly wards</i>
MABEL DILSTON	

Scene, CLAVERING HALL, NORTHUMBERLAND.

Time, 1816.

CHARACTERS IN THE INTERLUDE

ALVISE VIVARINI, *represented by* REGINALD CLAVERING.

GALASSO GALASSI, ,, ,, FRANK DILSTON.

BEATRICE SIGNORELLI, ,, ,, MABEL DILSTON.

FRANCESCA MARIANI, ,, ,, ANNE DILSTON.

ACT I

SCENE I. *A morning room*

ANNE *and* MABEL

ANNE

April again, and not a word of war.
Last year, and not a year ago, it was
That we sat wondering when good news would come.

MABEL

And had not heard or learnt in lesson-books
If such a place there was as Waterloo.
And never dreamed that——

ANNE

Well?

MABEL

That it would be
So soon for ever such a name for us
As Blenheim or Trafalgar.

ANNE

No. For us?
We don't remember Blenheim—and we had
No cousin wounded at Trafalgar. Still,
If Redgie had been old enough to serve——

MABEL

I wish he had chosen the navy.

ANNE

And come home
Unhurt?

MABEL

No; I forgot. Of course he might
Have died like Nelson—and gone home with him.

ANNE

Home? Reginald's not quite so tired of life,
I fancy, though he frets at being kept in,
As to look up—outside this world—for home.

MABEL

No.

ANNE

Will you tell me—but you will not—me,
Even——

MABEL

What? Anything I can I will.

ANNE

Perhaps you cannot—what he said to you
Yesterday ?

MABEL

When ?

ANNE

You will not now, I know.

MABEL

Where ?

ANNE

When and where ? If you must needs be told,
At nine last evening in the library.

MABEL

Nothing—but what I meant to tell you.

ANNE

Yes ?

You meant to tell me that he said, my dear,
What ?

MABEL

Anne !

ANNE

You thought I knew ?

MABEL

I thought I must
Have said it without speaking.

ANNE

Reginald !
And so you really mean to love the boy
You played with, rode with, climbed with, laughed
at, made
Your tempter—and your scapegoat—when you chose
To ride forbidden horses, and break bounds
On days forbidden ? Love ! Of course you like—
And then how can you love him ?

MABEL

Is dislike
Mother of love ? Then you—to judge by signs—
Must love Frank Dilston dearly.

ANNE

So I might,
If—if I did not hate him.

MABEL

Then you do.
I'm glad. I always liked him.

ANNE

What has he
Done, that a woman—or a girl—should like
Him ?

MABEL

Need a man—or boy—do anything
More than be true and bright and kind and brave
And try to make you like him?

ANNE

That spoils all.

He should not try.

MABEL

I'll tell him not to try.

Enter REGINALD CLAVERING *and* FRANK DILSTON

ANNE

Redgie! You've not been riding?

REGINALD

Have I, Frank?

FRANK

You'd have me tell a lie to get you off?

ANNE

You stupid pair of schoolboys! Really, Frank,
You should not let him.

FRANK

I can't lick him, Anne;
We two—or you alone—might manage.

ANNE

Why,
The grooms must know he should not mount a horse
Yet.

REGINALD

Would you have me never ride again
Because last year I got a fall?

ANNE

Appeal
To Mabel.

REGINALD

She was always hard on me.

MABEL

Always.

ANNE

You mean that I encouraged you
To risk your neck when we were girl and boy?
Make him sit down, Frank.

REGINALD

There. And now we'll talk
Of something—not of nothing.

ANNE

Of your play?

REGINALD

That's ready. How about your stage?

ANNE

But is it

Indeed?

REGINALD

It's just one little act, you know—
Enough for four and not too much, I hope,
To get by heart in half a pair of days.

ANNE

In one day? No: I am slow at learning verse—
Even if my part were shorter than the rest.

REGINALD

It is.

ANNE

Ah! Thank you.

FRANK

Mabel's I have read.

It's longer.

MABEL

As the whole affair is short,
It cannot be much longer. You should rest,
Redgie. Come out and feed the pheasants, Anne.

[*Exeunt ANNE and MABEL.*]

REGINALD

How like old times it is, when we came back
From Eton ! You remember, Frank, we played
—What was it ?—once.

FRANK

‘ What was it ? ’ There’s no such play.
There’s ‘ What you will ’ : perhaps we played
‘ Twelfth Night ’
In frocks and jackets. Might we now not play
‘ Love’s Labour’s Lost ’ ?

REGINALD

‘ A Midsummer Night’s Dream ’ :
I know, because I played Lysander—you
Demetrius.

FRANK

How the female parts were cast
You don’t remember ?

REGINALD

Helena was Anne,
I think, and Hermia Mabel.

FRANK

Change the names.

REGINALD

Ah, yes. All friends from more than twelve miles
round
Came in to our Yuletide gathering through the snows.
How quick and bright Anne's acting was ! you two
Bore off the palms all round : Mabel and I
Were somewhere short of nowhere.

FRANK

Will you now
Retaliate ? She and you were plotting this,
Must we suppose, last evening ?

REGINALD

She and I,
Frank ? We should make but poor conspirators.

FRANK

I hope so, and I think so. Seriously,
May not I ask—— ?

REGINALD

If she and I are friends ?
Surely a man may ask and answer that,
If—as you do—he knows it. If you mean
More—I would hardly tell a brother this,
Who had not been so close a friend of mine
Always, and had no right to ask me this—
No.

FRANK

Then she does not think—she has no cause—
She cannot think you love her ?

REGINALD

Can I tell ?

But this I can tell—she shall never come
To think or dream I do, and vex herself,
By any base and foolish fault of mine.

FRANK

But if she loves you, Redgie ?

REGINALD

No, my boy.

She does not. Come, we need not talk of that.
I think mock-modesty a mincing lie—
The dirtiest form of self-conceit that is,
Quite, and in either sense the vainest. You
She may not love just yet—but me, I know,
She never will. I ought to say ‘Thank God,’
Being poor, and knowing myself unworthy her
—A younger son’s son, with a closed career
Should peace prove now as stable as it looks—
If I on my side loved her as I should
And if I knew she would be, as I fear—
No, hope she will, happier with you than me
I can’t do that, quite ; if I could, and did,
I should be just a little less unfit
To dream that she could love me—which I don’t.

FRANK

You don't mean that you want me——

REGINALD

I do mean

I want her to be happy : as for you,
If I don't want you to be miserable
It only shows I am not quite a cur.

FRANK

You never were : but if you meant me well,
What made you go campaigning and come back
A hero ?

REGINALD

Six months' service ! Don't you be
A fool—or flatterer.

FRANK

Still, you have (worse luck !)
Such heavy odds—a wound, and Waterloo !

REGINALD

If I—or you—had lost an eye or arm,
That wouldn't make us Nelsons.

FRANK

Something like.

REGINALD

Well, you can do that in the hunting-field.

FRANK

I wish I had you in the playing-fields
Again.

REGINALD

We can't just settle it with fists.
But, if you asked me, as of course you don't
And won't, what she and I were talking of
Last evening, I could tell you—and I will.
I asked her if she thought it possible
That two such baby friends and playfellows
As she and Anne had been with you and me
Could, when grown up, be serious lovers.

FRANK

Well—
Was that not making love to her? And what
Did she say?

REGINALD

Hardly. No. Certainly not.

FRANK

And then?

REGINALD

The bell rang, and we went to dress
For dinner.

FRANK

What did she say—if she did—
To make you ask her that ?

REGINALD

Something she did—
At least, I thought so—like a fool. And now
We'll talk no more about it. Mind you, Frank,
I didn't—could I possibly?—forget
That just because I love her—more than you
I won't say—she must never dream I do
If I can help it.

FRANK

Then, in heaven's name, why
Say what you say you did ?

REGINALD

Don't fret yourself.
No harm was meant or done. But if she does
Love you—if you can win her—as I think
(There!)—you're the happiest fellow ever born.

FRANK

And you're the best, Redgie. By Jove ! she ought
To love you, if she knew how you love her.

REGINALD

And that, please God, she never will. When you
And she are married, if you tell her so,

You'll play the traitor, not to me but her—
Make her unhappy for the minute. Don't.
She would be sorrier than I'm worth, you know,
To think of any sorrow not her own
And given by her unconsciously. She had
Always the sweetest heart a girl could have.
'Sweet heart'! she might have been the first girl
born
Whose lover ever called her by the name.

FRANK

Redgie, I don't know what to say to you.

REGINALD

Say nothing. Talk about our play.

FRANK

Your play!
 We are like to play, it seems, without a stage,
 Another, and a sadder.

REGINALD

Don't be sure.
My play is highly tragic. Italy,
Steel, poison, shipwreck—

FRANK

One you made at school,
Is it? I know what those were.

REGINALD

Wait and see.

Enter SIR FRANCIS DILSTON

SIR FRANCIS

Well, Frank,—how are you, Reginald?—you let Mabel go out—and unattended?

FRANK

Come,
Father, you would not have me (think how she
Would hate it !) hang about her like a burr?

SIR FRANCIS

No—no. But there's a medium, sir, between
Neglect and persecution.

FRANK

Well, I hope
And think I've hit that medium.

SIR FRANCIS

Reginald,
If you were Mabel's lover, or in hope
To be her lover, could you slight her so?

REGINALD

I can't imagine that condition.

SIR FRANCIS

Then

You youngsters are no more your fathers' sons
Than moles are sons of eagles.

FRANK

Rats of cats,

Say, father.

SIR FRANCIS

Eh ! was that an epigram ?
The point, my boy ? Because we worry you ?

FRANK

Because we scuttle where you used to spring,
And nibble when you used to bite. At least,
You say so—or they say so.

SIR FRANCIS

Heaven forbid !

Tom Jones and Lovelace were not gods of ours.
But if we meant to win and keep a heart
Worth winning and worth keeping, Frank, we knew
We must not seem to slight it. 'Pique and soothe,'
Young Byron bids you—don't stand off and gape.
There may be better means than his, if you
Love as I trust you love her. There's the bell.

[Exeunt.]

SCENE II. *In the Garden*FRANK *and* MABEL

FRANK

I may not say what any man may say ?

MABEL

To me ? And any man, you think, may say
Foolish and heartless things to me ? or is it
Only the heir of Heronshaw who claims
A right so undeniable ?

FRANK

Is the taunt
Fair to yourself or me ? You do not think——

MABEL

You have the right to make mock love to me ?
I do not.

FRANK

How have you the right to call
Truth mockery, knowing I love you ?

MABEL

How should I
Know it ? If you mistake me now for Anne,
You may mistake her presently for me.

FRANK

Anne?

MABEL

If you care for either cousin—much,
It ought, by all I ever heard or read,
To be the one you are always bickering with.

FRANK

She does not like me.

MABEL

She does not dislike.

FRANK

Her liking would not help nor her dislike
Forbid me to be happy. You perhaps—
I can't guess how you can—may think so : she
Cannot. And if I did—worse luck for me !—
What chance should I have ? Can you not have seen
—Not once—not ever—how her face and eyes
Change when she looks at Redgie ?

MABEL

What !—Absurd !
You love her, and are mad with jealousy.

FRANK

Mad if I am, my madness is to love
You. But you must have seen it.

MABEL

I am not
Jealous.

FRANK

You need not have an eye to see it.
Her voice might tell you, when she speaks to him.

MABEL

The tone is just like yours or mine. Of course
We all make much—or something—of him now ;
Since he came back, I mean.

FRANK

From Waterloo ;
I knew it—an interesting young cousin. Well,
He does deserve his luck, I know ; he did
Always : and you were always good to him.

MABEL

He always needed somebody, poor boy,
To be so.

FRANK

Ah, if that were all ! Because
His guardian, my good father,—good to me
Always—his cousin, in whose grounds we now
Walk and discuss him—and his schoolmasters,
You think, were apt—

MABEL

To ill-use him ? No ; nor yet
Misunderstand him : that I did not mean.
But she who knew him and loved him best is gone—
His aunt and mine—your mother.

FRANK

Yes : she did
Love him ! she must have loved his mother more
Than many sisters love each other.

MABEL

More
Than I love Anne or Anne loves me ? I hope
Not. But when death comes in—and leaves behind
A child for pledge and for memorial, love
Must naturally feel more—I want the word ;
More of a call upon it—not a claim—
A sort of blind and dumb and sweet appeal
Out of the dark, and out of all the light
That burns no more but broods on all the past—
A glowworm on a grave. And you, I know,
Were never jealous : all the house knew that,
And loved you for it as we did.

FRANK

Ah—as you
Did ! I'd have had you love me more than they,
If it had not been too great and sweet a thing
For me to dream of.

MABEL

Do not dream at all.
What good can come of dreaming?

FRANK

Less than none,
If dreaming, doubt, or fear, should take away
The little comfort, such as it is—God knows,
Not much, though precious—that your kind last words
Gave me. Too kind they were, Mabel. I was,
And am, jealous of Redgie; more to-night
Than ever: but I will not be.

MABEL

I am sure
You will not. Why?

FRANK

Because I know—I am sure,
Mabel—more sure than you can be of me
Or I can of myself—he would not grudge
Nor envy me my happiness if you
Could bring yourself to make me happy.

MABEL

Why
Should he?

FRANK

Ask him.

MABEL

A pretty thing to ask !
But, Frank, it's good, and very good, of you
To say so—if you care for me at all,
And think it possible I could care for him.

FRANK

I think it more than possible : but he
Does not. You'll have to tell him. Don't let Anne
Hear you.

MABEL

I would not let her, certainly,
If I were tempted to propose to you.
Do you think that girls—that women do such things?

FRANK

No : but I do think—think, by heaven ! I know—
He will not tell you what a child might see,
That he can love, and does, better than I,
And all his heart is set on you. But Anne
Loves him : you must have seen it.

MABEL

You love her,
And do not know it, and take me for her, seeing
Her features in my face, and thinking she
Loves Redgie : is not this the truth ? Be frank,
Or change your name for one that means a lie—
Iscaiot or Napoleon.

FRANK

God forbid !

I tell you what I am sure of, as I am sure
I wish I were not.

MABEL

Sure? How can you be ?

FRANK

Are you not sure ? Be honest. Can you say
You doubt he would have told you—what he won't
And can't—had he been heir of Heronshaw
Or Anyshaw ? You might have spared that taunt,
Mabel. But can you say it ? You never were
A liar, and never can be. Tell him then
The truth he will not tell you.

MABEL

What if he
Rejects me ? This is past a joke.

FRANK

It is.

MABEL

I knew you could not love me. Why make love ?

FRANK

I love you ; but I see how you love him ;
And think you are right. He loves you more than I—

Yes, more than I can—more than most men could
Love even you. You are no mate for me,
I am no mate for you, the song says. Well,
So be it. God send you happiness with him !
He has done more than give you up—give up
All chance of you—he would not take the chance
That honour, as he thought, forbade. Do you
Reward him.

MABEL

God reward you, Frank ! You see
—It's true—I love him.

FRANK

And he will not speak.
Tell him to-morrow—and come in to-night.

[*Exeunt.*

ACT II

SCENE I. *Another part of the grounds**Enter* SIR ARTHUR CLAVERING *and* REGINALD

SIR ARTHUR

I'm glad you love the old place : to have you here—
You and the Dilstons—brings my father's time
Back. I might almost be your father, though ;
Yours, or your cousins'—Frank's or Mabel's. Time
Slips on like water.

REGINALD

Very softly, here ;
Less like the Kielder than the Deadwater
Till both make up the Tyne.

SIR ARTHUR

It wearies you,
Cousin? Make haste then and grow strong and
stout,
And ride away to battle : till you can,
I mean to keep you prisoner and be proud
I have a guest who struck beside the Duke
An English stroke at Waterloo.

REGINALD

Beside,
Arthur? There's no one born can boast of that.
The best we can—the very best of us—
Say for each other, is just, we followed him—
His hand and eye and word and thought—and did
What might be of our duty.

SIR ARTHUR

Well, my boy,
Did he do more? You're just a hothead still—
The very schoolboy that I knew you first—
On fire with admiration and with love
Of some one or of something, always. Now,
Who is it—besides your general? who—or which?
Anne's chestnut shell, or Mabel's golden fire—
Her emerald eyes, or Anne's dark violets—eh?
You have them both (a happy hero you!)
Dancing attendance on your highness. Here
Comes Mabel: have you not a glove to throw?

Enter MABEL

Dear cousin, make him talk to you: to me
He will not; and I have not time to dance
Attendance on him. [*Exit.*

REGINALD

Arthur's jokes are not
Diamonds for brilliance; but he's good.

MABEL

Are you?

REGINALD

You never asked me that of old times.

MABEL

No :

That was superfluous : all the household knew
How good a boy you were.

REGINALD

And you ? A girl

There was who loved the saddle as well as I,
And was not slower at breaking bounds.

MABEL

You have not

Forgiven me what you suffered for my sake
So often—much too often.

REGINALD

No, of course.

How should I ?

MABEL

You remember our old rides—

Tell me about your ride at Waterloo.

REGINALD

More like a swim against a charging sea
It was, than like a race across the moors
Yonder.

MABEL

But when a breaker got you down—
When you lay hurt it might have been to death—
Will you not tell me what you thought of then?

REGINALD

No.

MABEL

Nothing?

REGINALD

Nothing I can tell you of.

MABEL

Was all a mist and whirlwind—like the shore
Out yonder when the north-east wind is high?
That I can fancy. But when sense came back
You thought of nothing you can tell me of,
Reginald? nothing?

REGINALD

Nothing I can tell
Any one—least of all, women or men,
Frank's wife that is to be, Mabel.

MABEL

And where
Has Frank concealed her from all eyes but yours?
You are too sharp-sighted, Redgie.

REGINALD

Did she not
Ask me just now what if she knew—she must
Have known the answer that I could not make—
It was not right or kind to ask?

MABEL

Not she.

REGINALD

Mabel!

MABEL

She's innocent, at least.

REGINALD

You mean——?

MABEL

I mean she is not here. Nor anywhere
But in the silliest dreamiest brain alive—
The blindest head cheating the trustiest heart
That ever made a man—untrustworthy.
You did not dream or think of any old friend—
Anne, Frank, or me—when you were lying, cut down,
Helpless, that hideous summer night? And now
You will not speak or stir? O, Reginald,
Must I say everything—and more—and you
Nothing?

REGINALD

My love! Mabel! What can I?

MABEL

Say

Just that again.

REGINALD

How can it be?

MABEL

My love,

How could it not be?

REGINALD

How have I deserved

This?

MABEL

How can I tell you? Do you tell me
Now, what you would not tell Frank's wife.

REGINALD

You know

I need not tell you.

MABEL

Tell me, though.

REGINALD

I thought,
Between the shoots and swoonings, off and on,
How hard it was, if anything was hard
When one was dying for England, not to see
Mabel, when I could see the stars. I thought

How sweet it was to know they shone on her
Asleep or waking, here at home. I thought
I could have wished, and should not wish, to send
My whole heart's love back as my life went out,
To find her here and clasp her close and say
What I could never—how much I had loved her.

Then

I thought how base and bad a fool I was
To dream of wishing what would grieve her. Then
I think I fell asleep.

MABEL

And that was all,

Redgie ?

REGINALD

And that was all, Mabel.

MABEL

You did—

You did not think, if she had known—if she,
Asleep and dreaming here, had dreamed of it—
What love she would have sent you back for yours—
Yours—how could she be worth it ? Did you not
See, as you lay—know, as your pain sank down
And died and left you yet not quite asleep—
How past all words she loved you ? Reginald !
You did not ?

REGINALD

How should I have dreamed of heaven ?
I'm not a saint, Mabel.

MABEL

And what am I
Who ask a man what, being the man he is,
He will not ask me—and am not ashamed?

REGINALD

You are more than ever a man whom heaven loved best
Saw shining out of heaven in dreams—more dear,
More wonderful than angels. How you can
Care for me really and truly—care for me,
It beats my wits to guess.

MABEL

It's very strange,
Of course : what is there in you to be loved?

REGINALD

There's many a true word said in jest. But you !
Why, all the world might fall down at your feet
And you not find a man in all the world
Worth reaching out your hand to raise. And I !
The best luck never finds the best man out,
They say ; but no man living could deserve
This.

MABEL

Well, you always were the best to me ;
The brightest, bravest, kindest boy you were
That ever let a girl misuse him—make
His loving sense of honour, courage, faith,

Devotion, rods to whip him—literally,
You know—and never by one word or look
Protested. You were born a hero, sir.
Deny it, and tell a louder lie than when
You used to take my faults upon you. How
I loved you then, and always! Now, at last,
You see, you make me tell it: which is not
As kind as might be, or as then you were.

REGINALD

I never was or could be fit for you
To glance on or to tread on. You, whose face
Was always all the light of all the world
To me—the sun of suns, the flower of flowers,
The wonder of all wonders—and your smile
The light that lit the dawn up, and your voice
A charm that might have thrilled and stilled the sea—
You, to put out that heavenly hand of yours
And lift up me to heaven, above all stars
But those God gave you for your eyes on earth
That all might know his angel!

MABEL

There—be still.

Enter FRANK (at a distance)

Here comes our bridesman—and our matchmaker.
He told me that he loved me yesterday,
But that you loved me better—more than he,
And, Redgie, that you would not tell me so
Till I had made an offer for your hand.
A prophet, was he not?

REGINALD

Did he say that?

I'd like to black his boots.

MABEL

You weren't his fag,
Were you?—Well, Frank, you told me yesterday
Nothing but truth : and this has come of it.

FRANK

Your hand in Redgie's? All goes right, then?

MABEL

All :

I did not give him, I confess, a chance.

REGINALD

Frank, I can't look you in the face—and yet
I hope and think I have not played you false.

FRANK

Well, if you swore you had, Redgie my boy,
I'd not believe you. You play false, indeed !
To look me in the face and tell me that
Would need more brass than nature gave your brows.

REGINALD

But how to look your father in the face—
Upon my honour ! You must help me, Frank.

FRANK

And that I will, Redgie. But don't you dream
He'll think there's any need of any help,
Excuse, or pretext for you. Any fool
Must have foreseen it.

MABEL

Yes—I think he must.
Any but one, at least—who would not see.
Frank, I proposed to him—I did. He is
So scandalously stupid!

FRANK

Ah, you know,
I told you. That was unavoidable.

REGINALD

You sons and daughters of good luck and wealth
Make no allowance—cannot, I suppose—
For such poor devils as poor relations. Frank,
I think I see you—in my place, I mean—
Making the least love in the world to her—
Letting her dream you loved her!

FRANK

Well, did you?

MABEL

He did.

REGINALD

I don't know how I did.

MABEL

But I

Know.

FRANK

I can guess. He never dropped a word
Nor looked a look to say it—and so you knew.

MABEL

Yes ; that was it.

FRANK

When I go courting, then,
I'll take a leaf out of old Redgie's book,
And never risk a whisper—never be
Decently civil. Well, it's good to see
How happy you two are.

MABEL

Hush ! Here comes Anne.

Enter ANNE

ANNE

I heard what Frank said. And I hope you are
Happy, and always will be.

REGINALD

Thanks. And yet
I know I ought not.

ANNE

Complimentary, that,
To Mabel.

REGINALD

Mabel understands.

ANNE

Of course.
She always understood you.

REGINALD

Did she? No :
She always made too much of me—and now
Much more too much than ever. God knows why.

ANNE

God knows what happiness I wish you both.

REGINALD

Thank her, Mabel.

MABEL

I can't. She frightens me.
Anne !

ANNE

Am I grown frightful to all of you?
Are you afraid of me, Reginald?

REGINALD

What
Can ail you, Mabel? What can frighten you?

ANNE

Excitement—passionate happiness—I see.
Enough to make a girl—before men's eyes—
Shrink almost from her sister.

MABEL

Anne, you knew
This was to be—if Redgie pleased.

ANNE

I did;
And did not doubt it would be.

FRANK

These are strange
Congratulations. Anne, you must have thought
It would not.

ANNE

What I thought or did not think
I know perhaps as well as you. And now
I need not surely twice congratulate
My sister and my brother—soon to be.

MABEL

Let us go in.

ANNE

You seem so happy too
That we must all congratulate you, Frank.

[Exeunt.]

ACT III

SCENE I. *In the Garden*ANNE *and* MABEL

ANNE

This heartsease bed is richer than it was
Last year—and so it should be ; should it not ?
For your sake and for his, I mean. See here ;
Here's one all black—a burning cloud of black,
With golden sunrise at its heart ; and here's
One all pure gold from shapely leaf to leaf,
And just its core or centre black as night.

MABEL

They call them pansies too, you know.

ANNE

But you
Must call them heartsease now. Tell me—what
thoughts
Have lovers that the lovely plain old name
Would not suit better than all others ?

MABEL

None that I know of—nor does Redgie. None,
How can we two thank God enough? Anne,

ANNE

I cannot tell you, Mabel. All your thoughts
Are flowers, you say, and flowers as sweet as these
Whose perfume makes the rose's coarse and dull ;
And how then could I tell you how to thank
God? He has given you something—thought or
truth,
If truth and thought are not the same—which I
Cannot, you know, imagine.

MABEL

Ah, you will
Some day, and soon—you must and will.

ANNE

That. Can the world supply me, do you think,
With such another Redgie?

MABEL.

That's not fair.

ANNE

I must put up with something secondrate?
Frank, for example—if he'd have me? No,

Dear Mabel : be content with happiness ;
And do not dream it gives you power to play
Providence, or a prophet. Is he not
Waiting for you—there, by the hawthorns—there—
And, certainly, not wanting me?

MABEL

He is !

I told him not to come and wait for me. [Exit.

ANNE

I cannot bear it : and I cannot die.

Enter SIR ARTHUR

SIR ARTHUR

Our lovers are not here? Ah, no ; they want
Seclusion—shade and space between the trees
To chirp and twitter. Well, no wonder.

ANNE

No.

SIR ARTHUR

The handsomest and happiest pair they are
That England or Northumberland could show,
Are they not ?

ANNE

Yes ; Mabel is beautiful.

SIR ARTHUR

You don't think much of Redgie, then?

ANNE

He looks,

With all that light soft shining curly hair,
Too boyish for his years and trade : but men
Don't live or die by their good looks or bad.

SIR ARTHUR

You don't call soldiership a trade? And then,
His years are not so many—not half mine,
And I'm not quite a greybeard.

ANNE

Let him be

Apollo—Apollino if you like,
Your all but girl-faced godling in the hall.
He did not win her with his face or curls.

SIR ARTHUR

I am proud to know he did not. Are not you?

ANNE

Proud of him? Why should I be?

SIR ARTHUR

No ; of her.

ANNE

O! Yes, of course—very. Not every girl,
Of course, would condescend—to look so high.

SIR ARTHUR

A fine young loyal fellow, kind and brave,
Wants no more gilding, does he?

ANNE

Luckily,

We see, he does not. Here she comes alone.
She has sent him in to rest—or speak to Frank.

Re-enter MABEL

You have not kept him hanging round you long.
You are not exacting, Mabel.

MABEL

Need I be?

ANNE

We see you need not.

SIR ARTHUR

Mabel, may I say

How very and truly glad I am?

MABEL

You may

Indeed, and let me thank you. That you must.

SIR ARTHUR

It makes one laugh, or smile at least, to think
That Master Redgie always was till now
The unlucky boy—the type of luckless youth,
Poor fellow—and now it seems you are going to give
Or rather have given him more than his deserts
Or most men's, if not any man's. I am
Glad.

MABEL

Please don't compliment. You know I have known
Reginald all my life—and can't but know
How much more he deserves than I can give.

ANNE

She has the courage of her faith, you see.

MABEL

Don't play at satire, Annie, when you know
How true it is.

ANNE

Of course I know it, Mab.
He always was incomparable. At school
His masters always said so, and at home—
Ah, well, perhaps the grooms did.

MABEL

One would think
You did not know him, and hated him. I wish
Almost he did not—as he does—deserve
Far more than I shall bring.

SIR ARTHUR

Impossible :
Even if he were—no subaltern, but even
The Duke himself.

Enter FRANK and REGINALD

FRANK

Who's talking of the Duke ?
Ask Redgie what he thinks of him.

REGINALD

No, don't.
My name's not Homer.

ANNE

Frenchmen say——

REGINALD

Dear Anne,
Don't you say 'Frenchmen say'—say 'Frenchmen lie.'
They call the man who thrashes them a cur ;
Then what must they be ?

SIR ARTHUR

Try to tell us, though,
Something—if only to confute the frogs
And shame their craven croaking.

REGINALD

What on earth
Can I or any man—could Wordsworth, even—
Say that all England has not said of him
A thousand times, and will not say again
Ten thousand?

SIR ARTHUR

Come, my boy, you're privileged,
You know : you have served, and seen him.

REGINALD

Seen him? Yes.
You see the sun each morning ; but the sun
Takes no particular notice and displays
No special aspect just for your behoof,
Does it?

MABEL

He never spoke to you?

REGINALD

To me?

MABEL

Why not?

REGINALD

He might of course to any one ;
But I'm not lucky—never was, you know.

ANNE

They say that none of you who have followed him
Love him as Frenchmen love Napoleon.

REGINALD

No.

How should they? No one loves the sun as much
As drunken fools love wildfires when they go
Plunging through marsh and mire and quag and
haugh
To find a filthy grave.

SIR ARTHUR

Come, come, my boy!
Remember—'love your enemies.'

REGINALD

When I have
Any, I'll try; but not my country's; not
Traitors and liars and thieves and murderers—not
Heroes of French or Irish fashion. Think
How fast the Duke stands always—how there's not
A fellow—can't be—drudging in the rear
Who does not know as well as that the sun
Shines, that the man ahead of all of us
Is fit to lead or send us anywhere
And sure to keep quick time with us, if we
Want or if duty wants him—bids the chief
Keep pace with you or me. And then just think,
Could he, suppose he had been—impossibly—
Beaten and burnt out of the country, lashed,

Lashed like a hound and hunted like a hare
Back to his form or kennel through the snow,
Have left his men dropping like flies, devoured
By winter as if by fire, starved, frozen, blind,
Maimed, mad with torment, dying in hell, while he
Scurried and scuttled off in comfort?

MABEL

No.

He could not. Arthur quite agrees. And now
Be quiet.

SIR ARTHUR

Redgie takes away one's breath.
But that's the trick to catch young ladies' hearts—
Enthusiasm on the now successful side.

MABEL

Successful! If we could have failed, you know,
He would have been—he, I, and you and all,
All of us, all, more passionate and keen
And hotter in our faith and loyalty
And bitterer in our love and hate than now
When thoughts of England and her work are not
Tempered with tears that are not born of pride
And joy that pride makes perfect.

FRANK

Let's be cool.

I have not seen you quite so hot and red
Since you were flogged for bathing at the Weir,
Redgie.

REGINALD

Which time? the twentieth?

FRANK

That at least.

MABEL

Poor fellow !

REGINALD

Ah, you always pitied me—
And spoilt me.

MABEL

No one else did, Reginald.

REGINALD

And right and wise they were—a worthless whelp !

MABEL

Very. Not worth a thought—were you ?

REGINALD

I'm sure
Not worth a tear of yours—and yet you cried
Sometimes, you know, for my mischances.

SIR ARTHUR

Ay?
So, boy and girl were born for bride and groom,
Were they? There's nothing now to cry for, then.

ANNE

Arthur forgets : are love and happiness
Nothing to cry for? Tears, we are told, are signs
Infallible—indispensable—of joy.

FRANK

Mabel and Redgie, then, must be just now
Unhappy—very unhappy. Can they fill
With us their parts to-morrow in his play?

MABEL

Yes : I know mine ; and Anne knows hers.

ANNE

And Frank
His. Does he stab you, Redgie, on the stage?

REGINALD

Yes, as I save him from the shipwreck.

SIR ARTHUR

That's something like a villain.

Good !

ANNE

I'm as bad.
I poison Mabel—out of love for Frank.

SIR ARTHUR

Heaven help us, what a tragic day or night !
It's well the drawing-room and the libraries
Are all rigged up ship-shape, with stage and box
Ready, and no such audience to be feared
As might—I don't say would, though, Reginald—
Hiss you from pit and gallery.

REGINALD

That they would !
It's all a theft from Dodsley's great old plays,
I know you'll say—thirdrate and secondhand.
The book, you know, you lent me when a boy—
Or else I borrowed and you did not lend.

SIR ARTHUR

That's possible, you bad young scamp. I wish
We could have seen it played in the open air,
Boccaccio-like—but that would scarcely suit
With April in Northumberland.

ANNE

Not quite.

REGINALD

Come, don't abuse our climate and revile
The crowning county of England—yes, the best
It must be.

FRANK

Now he's off again.

REGINALD

I'm not.

But I just ask you where you'll find its like?
Have you and I, then, raced across its moors
Till horse and boy were wellnigh mad with glee
So often, summer and winter, home from school,
And not found that out? Take the streams away,
The country would be sweeter than the south
Anywhere: give the south our streams, would it
Be fit to match our borders? Flower and crag,
Burnside and boulder, heather and whin—you don't
Dream you can match them south of this? And then,
If all the unwatered country were as flat
As the Eton playing-fields, give it back our burns,
And set them singing through a sad south world,
And try to make them dismal as its fens—
They won't be! Bright and tawny, full of fun
And storm and sunlight, taking change and chance
With laugh on laugh of triumph—why, you know
How they plunge, pause, chafe, chide across the rocks
And chuckle along the rapids, till they breathe
And rest and pant and build some bright deep bath
For happy boys to dive in, and swim up,
And match the water's laughter.

SIR ARTHUR

You at least
Know it, we doubt not. Woodlands too we have,
Have we not, Mabel? beech, oak, aspen, pine,
And Redgie's old familiar friend, the birch,
With all its blithe lithe bounty of buds and sprays
For hapless boys to wince at, and grow red,

And feel a tingling memory prick their skins—
Sting till their burning blood seems all one blush—
Eh?

REGINALD

I beg pardon if I bored you. But—
You know there's nothing like this country. Frank,
Is there?

FRANK

I never will dispute with you
Anything, Redgie. This is what you call
Being peaceable, is it? firing up like tow
And rattling off like small-shot?

REGINALD

I can't help—
Can I?

FRANK

When you said that at school, my lad,
It didn't help you much.

MABEL

Don't bully him so.
Don't let them, Redgie.

SIR ARTHUR

Redgie must be proof
Now against jokes that used to make the boy
Frown, blush, and wince: and well he may be.

ANNE

Why?

Is Reginald much wiser than he was?
He seems to me the same boy still.

SIR ARTHUR

He is,

I think ; but now the luckiest living.

REGINALD

Yes.

I'm half afraid one ought not anyhow
To be so happy. None of you, I know,
Our brothers and our sister, think it right.
You cannot. Nor do I.

SIR ARTHUR

A willow-wreath

For Mabel ! Redgie turns her off.

MABEL

He might,

•
If she would let him : but he'll find her grasp
Tenacious as a viper's. Be resigned,
Redgie : I shall not let you go.

REGINALD

I am

Resigned. But if God bade one rise to heaven
At once, and sit above the happiest there,

Resigned one might be—possibly : but still
Would not one shrink for shame's sake? Look at her
And me !

SIR ARTHUR

I never saw a better match.

MABEL

I never had so sweet a compliment
Paid me. I shan't forget it, Arthur.

REGINALD

What
Possesses all of you to try and turn
The poor amount of head I have, I can't
Imagine. One might think you had laid a bet
To make a man shed tears by way of thanks
And laugh at him for crying. Frank,—Arthur,—Anne,
You know I know how good it is of you
To wish me joy—and how I thank you : that
You must know.

ANNE

Surely, Reginald, we do.
Goodwill like ours could hardly miss, I trust,
Of gratitude like yours.

MABEL

What is it, Anne?
What makes you smile so?

ANNE

Would you have me frown ?

MABEL

Rather than smile like that : you would not look
So enigmatic.

ANNE

Let it pass, my dear :
We shall not smile to-morrow, when we play
Tragedy—shall we ? Are the properties
Ready—stiletto and poison-flask ?

REGINALD

Ah, there
We are lucky. There's the old laboratory, made
It seems for our stage purpose, where you know
Sir Edward kept his chemicals and things—
Collections of the uncanniest odds and ends,
Poisons and weapons from all parts of the earth,
Which Arthur lets us choose from.

ANNE

Are they safe
To play with ?

MABEL

Are we children, Annie ? Still
Perhaps you are right : we had better let them be.

SIR ARTHUR

The daggers are not dangerous—blunt as lead—
That I shall let you youngsters play with.

REGINALD

Good :

But how about the poison ? let us have
A genuine old Venetian flask to fill
With wine and water.

ANNE

Let me choose it.

MABEL

You ?

Why ?

ANNE

I know more about such things.

MABEL

About

Poison ?

ANNE

About the loveliest oldworld ware
Fonthill or Strawberry Hill could furnish : I'm
Miss Beckford, or Horatia Walpole.

SIR ARTHUR

And take your choice of the empty flasks. Come
choose Don't
A full one by mistake.

ANNE

I promise not.

[*Exeunt* SIR ARTHUR *and* ANNE.]

FRANK

I leave you to consult together, then—
The playwright and his heroine : that's but fair.
[Exit.]

MABEL

I don't quite like it, Redgie : I'm afraid
Anne is not happy : I'm afraid.

REGINALD

My love,
Is any one unhappy in the world?
I can't just now believe in wretchedness.

MABEL

But I can. Redgie, do be good—and grave.
I talk to you as if you were grown-up,
You see.

REGINALD

You do me too much honour.

MABEL

That

I do, you stupidest of tiresome boys.
Still, you were never ill-natured, were you? Well,
Have you not—boys see nothing—don't you think
You might have seen, had you but eyes, that Anne
Is not—I don't say (that would be absurd)
As happy as we are—no one could be that—
But not—not happy at all?

REGINALD

My darling, no.

What dream is this—what lunacy of love?

MABEL

Well—I must tell you everything, I see—
I wish I did not and I could not think
Her heart or fancy—call it either—were
More fixed on Frank than ever his on me.

REGINALD

Eh! Well, why not? If he can come to love
Any one, after thinking once he loved
You—and you would not have it break his heart
Quite, would you?—what could well befall us all
Happier than this? You don't suppose he can?
To me it seems—you know how hard and strange
It seems to hope or fancy: but God grant
It may be! If old Frank were happy once,
I should not feel I ought not—now and then—
To be so happy always.

MABEL

But you ought.
How good you are, Redgie !

REGINALD

O, very good.
I'd like—I want—to see my dearest friends
Happy—without a touch of trouble or pains
For me to take or suffer. Wonderful,
Is it not ? saintly—great—heroic ?

MABEL

Well,
I think you may—I think we shall. But don't
Be boyish—don't be prompting Frank : you know,
Reginald, what I mean.

REGINALD

Yes : that he may—
Will, very likely—want a hand like yours
Rather than mine to help him—bring him through—
Give him a lift or shove.

MABEL

Leave well alone.
That's all I mean.

REGINALD

You always did know best,
And always will : I shall be always right
Now that my going or doing or saying depends

On you. It's well you are what you are : you might,
If you were evil-minded, make a man
Run from his post—betray or yield his flag—
Duck down his head and scuttle.

MABEL

Not a man

Like you.

REGINALD

Let no man boast himself ; does not
The Bible say—something like that ?

MABEL

Perhaps.

But then you don't, and never did, you know—
Not even about this play of yours. Come in :
The windy darkness creeps and leaps by fits
Up westward : clouds, and neither stars nor sun,
And just the ghost of a lost moon gone blind
And helpless. If we are to play at all,
I must rehearse my part again to-night. [*Exeunt.*

ACT IV

SCENE I. *A stage representing a garden by the sea*

SONG (*from within*)

Love and Sorrow met in May
Crowned with rue and hawthorn-spray,
And Sorrow smiled.
Scarce a bird of all the spring
Durst between them pass and sing,
And scarce a child.

Love put forth his hand to take
Sorrow's wreath for sorrow's sake,
Her crown of rue.
Sorrow cast before her down
Even for love's sake Love's own crown,
Crowned with dew.

Winter breathed again, and spring
Cowered and shrank with wounded wing
Down out of sight.
May, with all her loves laid low,
Saw no flowers but flowers of snow
That mocked her flight.

Love rose up with crownless head
Smiling down on springtime dead,
On wintry May.
Sorrow, like a cloud that flies,
Like a cloud in clearing skies,
Passed away.

Enter ALVISE

ALVISE

This way she went : the nightingales that heard
Fell silent, and the loud-mouthed salt sea-wind
Took honey on his lips from hers, and breathed
The new-born breath of roses. Not a weed
That shivers on the storm-shaped lines of shore
But felt a fragrance in it, and put on
The likeness of a lily.

Enter GALASSO

GALASSO

Thou art here.
God will not let thee hide thyself too close
For hate and him to find thee. Draw : the light
Is good enough to die by.

ALVISE

Thou hast found him
That would have first found thee. Set thou thy sword
To mine, its edge is not so fain to bite
As is my soul to slay thee. [*They draw.*

Enter BEATRICE and FRANCESCA

BEATRICE

What is this?
What serpent have ye trod on?

ALVISE

Didst thou bid me
Draw, seeing far off the surety for thy life
That women's tongues should bring thee?

BEATRICE

Speak not to him.
Speak to me—me, Alvise.

ALVISE

Sweet, be still.
Galassi, shall I smite thee on the lips
That dare not answer with a lie to mine
And know they cannot, if they speak, but lie?

GALASSO

Thou knowest I dare not in Beatrice's sight
Strike thee to hell—nor threaten thee.

ALVISE

I know
Thou liest. She stands between thy grave and thee,
As thou between the sun and hell.

FRANCESCA

My lord,
Forbear him.

GALASSO

I am not thy lord ; who made me
Master or lord of thine ? Not God should say,

Save with his tongue of thunder, and be heard
(If hearing die not in a dead man's ear),
'Forbear him.'

ALVISE

Nay, Beatrice, bid not me
Forbear : he will not let me bid him live.

GALASSO

Thou shalt not find a tongue some half-hour hence
To pray with to my sword for time to pray
And die not damned.

FRANCESCA

Sir, speak not blasphemy.
Death's wings beat round about us day and night :
Their wind is in our faces now. I pray you,
Take heed.

GALASSO

Of what? of God, or thee? Not I.
But let Beatrice bend to me——

ALVISE

To thee?
Bend? Nay, Beatrice, bind me not in chains,
Who would not play thy traitor : give my sword
What God gives all the waves and birds of the air,
Freedom.

BEATRICE

He gives it not to slay.

ALVISE

He shall.

Are the waves bloodless or the vultures bland?
Loose me, love : leave me : let me go.

BEATRICE

Thou shalt not

Put off for me before my face thy nature,
Thy natural name of man, to mock with murder
The murderous waves and beasts of ravin. Slay me,
And God may give thee leave to slay him : I
Shall know not of it ever.

GALASSO

Vivarini,

These women's hands that here strike peace between
us

To-morrow shall not stead thee. Live a little :
My sword is not more thirsty than the sea,
Nor less secure in patience. Thou shalt find
A sea-rock for thy shipwreck on dry land here
When thou shalt steer again upon the steel of it
And find its fang's edge mortal. *[Exit.]*

ALVISE

Have ye shamed me?

Mine enemy goes down seaward with no sign
Set of my sword upon him.

BEATRICE

Let him pass.
To-morrow brings him back from sea—if ever
He come again.

FRANCESCA

How should not he come back, then?

BEATRICE

The sea hath shoals and storms.

ALVISE

God guard him—till
He stand within my sword's reach!

FRANCESCA

Pray thou rather
God keep thee from the reach of his.

ALVISE

He cannot,
Except he smite to death or deadly sickness
One of us ere we join. My saint Beatrice,
Thou hast no commission, angel though thou be,
sweet,
Given thee of God to guard mine enemy's head
Or cross me as his guardian.

BEATRICE

Would I cross thee,
The spirit I live by should stand up to chide

The soul-sick will that moved me. Yet I would not
Had I God's leave in hand to give thee, give
Thy sword and his such leave to cross as might
Pierce through my heart in answer.

ALVISE

Wouldst thou bid me,
When he comes back to-morrow from the sea
Whereon to-day his ship rides royal, yield
Thee and my sword up to him?

FRANCESCA

Nay, not her :
Thy sword she might.

ALVISE

She would not.

BEATRICE

Fain I would,
And keep thine honour perfect.

ALVISE

That may be,
When heaven and hell kiss, and the noon puts on
The starry shadow of midnight. Sweet, come in :
The wind grows keener than a flower should face
And fear no touch of trouble. Doubt me not
That I will take all heed for thee and me,
Who am now no less than one least part of thee.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II. *The same**Enter BEATRICE and FRANCESCA*

BEATRICE

The wind is sharp as steel, and all the sky
That is not red as molten iron black
As iron long since molten. How the flowers
Cringe down and shudder from the scourge ! I would
Galasso's ship were home in harbour.

FRANCESCA

Here ?

What comfort wouldst thou give him ?

BEATRICE

What should I give ?

Hadst thou some gentler maiden's mercy in thee,
Thou might'st, though death hung shuddering on
his lips
And mixed its froth of anguish with the sea's,
Revive him.

FRANCESCA

I, Beatrice ?

BEATRICE

Who but thou,

Francesca ?

FRANCESCA

Mock not, lest thy scoff turn back
Like some scared snake to sting thee.

BEATRICE

Nay, not I :
Dost thou not mock me rather, knowing I know
Thou lov'st him as I love not ? as I love
Alvise ?

FRANCESCA

There is none I love but God.
Thou knowest he doth not love me.

BEATRICE

Dost thou dream
His love for me is even as thine for him,
Born of a braver father than is hate,
A fairer mother than is envy ? Me
He loves not as he hates my lover : thou
Mayst haply set—as in this garden-ground
Half barren and all bitter from the sea
Some light of lilies shoots the sun's laugh back—
Even in the darkness of his heart and hate
Some happier flower to spring against thy smile
And comfort thee with blossom.

FRANCESCA

Thou shouldst be not
So fast a friend of mine : we were not born

I a Mariani, a Signorelli thou,
To play, with love and hate at odds with life,
Sisters.

BEATRICE

I know not in what coign of the heart
The root of hate strikes hellward, nor what rains
Make fat so foul a spiritual soil with life,
Nor what plague-scattering planets feed with fire
Such earth as brings forth poison. What is hate
That thou and I should know it ?

FRANCESCA

I cannot tell.
Flowers are there deadlier than all blights of the air
Or hell's own reek to heavenward : springs, whose
water
Puts out the pure and very fire of life
As clouds may kill the sunset : sins and sorrows,
Hate winged as love, and love walled round as
hate is,
With fear and weaponed wrath and arm-girt anguish,
There have been and there may be. Wouldst thou
dream now
This flower were mortal poison, or this flasket
Filled full with juice of colder-blooded flowers
And herbs the faint moon feeds with dew, that
warily
I bear about me against the noonday's needs,
When the sun ravins and the waters reek
With lustrous fume and feverous light like fire,
Preservative against it ?

BEATRICE

Sure, the flower
Could hurt no babe as bright and soft as it
More than it hurts us now to smell to : nor
Could any draught that heals or harms be found
Preservative against it.

FRANCESCA

Yet perchance
Preservative this draught of mine might prove
Against the bitterness of life—of noon,
I would say—heat, and heavy thirst, and faintness
That binds with lead the lids of the eyes, and hangs
About the heart like hunger.

BEATRICE

I am athirst ;
Thy very words have made me : and the noon
Indeed is hot. Let me drink of it.

FRANCESCA

Drink.

BEATRICE

The wells are not so heavenly cold. What comfort
Thou hast given me ! I shall never thirst again,
I think.

FRANCESCA

I am sure thou shalt not—till thou wake
Out of the next kind sleep that shall fall on thee
And hold thee fast as love, an hour or twain hence.

BEATRICE

I thank thee for thy gentle words and promises
More than for this thy draught of healing. Sleep
Is half the seed of life—the seed and stay of it—
And love is all the rest.

FRANCESCA

Thou art sure of that?

Be sure, then.

BEATRICE

How should I be less than sure of it?
Alvise's love and thine confirm and comfort
Mine own with like assurance. All the wind's wrath
That darkens now the whitening sea to southward
Shall never blow the flame that feeds the sun out
Nor bind the stars from rising: how should grief,
then,

Evil, or envy, change or chance of ruin,
Lay hand on love to mar him? Death, whose tread
Is white as winter's ever on the sea
Whose waters build his charnel, hath no kingdom
Beyond the apparent verge and bourn of life
Whereon to reign or threaten. Love, not he,
Is lord of chance and change: the moons and suns
That measure time and lighten serve him not,
Nor know they if a shadow at all there be
That fear and fools call death, not seeing each year
How thick men's dusty days and crumbling hours
Fall but to rise like stars and bloom like flowers.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE III. *The same**Enter ALVISE and BEATRICE*

ALVISE

Thou art not well at ease : come in again
And rest : the day grows dark as nightfall, ere
Night fall indeed upon it.

BEATRICE

No, not yet.

I do not fear the thunder, nor the sea
That mocks and mates the thunder. What I fear
I know not : but I will not go from hence
Till that sea-thwarted ship's crew thwart the sea
Or perish for its pasture. See, she veers,
And sets again straight hither. All good saints,
Whose eyes unseen of ours that here lack light
Hallow the darkness, guard and guide her ! Lo,
She reels again, and plunges shoreward : God,
Whose hand with curb immeasurable as they
Bridles and binds the waters, bid the wind
Fall down before thee silent ere it slay,
And death, whose clarion rends the heart of the air,
Be dumb as now thy mercy ! O, that cry
Had more than tempest in it : life borne down
And hope struck dead with horror there put forth
Toward heaven that heard not for the clamouring
 sea
Their last of lamentation.

ALVISE

Some there are—
Nay, one there is comes shoreward. If mine eyes
Lie not, being baffled of the wind and sea,
The face that flashed upon us out of hell
Between the reflux and the swallowing wave
Was none if not Galassi's. Nay, go in :
Look not upon us.

BEATRICE

Wherefore ?

ALVISE

Must I not
Save him to slay to-morrow ? If I let
The sea's or God's hand slay mine enemy first,
That hand strikes dead mine honour. [*Exit.*

BEATRICE

Save him, Christ !
God, save him ! Death is at my heart : I feel
His breath make darkness round me.

Enter FRANCESCA

FRANCESCA

Dost thou live yet ?
Dost thou live ?

BEATRICE

I know not. What art thou,
To question me of life and death ?

FRANCESCA

I am not

The thing I was.

BEATRICE

The friend I loved and knew thee
Thou art not. This fierce night that leaps up east-
ward,

Laughing with hate and hunger, loud and blind,
Is not less like the sunrise. What strange poison
Has changed thy blood, that face and voice and spirit
(If spirit or sense bid voice or face interpret)
Should change to this that meets me?

FRANCESCA

Did I drink

The poison that I gave thee? Thou art dead now :
Not the oldest of the world's forgotten dead
Hath less to do than thou with life. Thou shalt not
Set eyes again on one that loved thee : here
No face but death's and mine, who hate thee deadlier
Than life hates death, shalt thou set eyes on. Die,
And dream that God may save thee : from my hands
Alive thou seest he could not.

Re-enter ALVISE with GALASSO

ALVISE

Stand, I say.

Stand up. Thou hast no hurt upon thee. Stand,
And gather breath to praise God's grace with.

Thy sword had borne down mine, thou hadst let me live
And shamed me out of living : now, I am sure,
Thou shalt not twice rebuke me. [*Stabs him.*

BEATRICE

Death is good :
He gives me back Alvisè.

ALVISE

Was it thou
Or God, Beatrice, speaking out of heaven,
Who turned my death to life ?

BEATRICE

I am dying, Alvisè :
I thought to have left—perchance to have lost thee :
now
We shall not part for ever. [*Dies.* ALVISE *dies.*

FRANCESCA

Wilt thou stand
Star-struck to death, Galasso ? Let our dead
Lie dead, while we fly fleet as birds or winds
Forth of the shadow of death, and laugh, and live
As happy as these were hapless.

GALASSO

She—is she
Dead ? Hath she kissed the death upon his lips
And fed it full from hers ?

FRANCESCA

Why, dost thou dream

I did not kill her ?

GALASSO

Not a devil in hell

But one cast forth on earth could do it : and she
Shall shame the light of heaven no longer.

[Stabs her.]

FRANCESCA

Fool,

Thou hast set me free from fate and fear : I knew
Thou wouldst not love me.

[Dies.]

GALASSO

What am I, to live
And see this death about me ? Death and life
Cast out so vile a thing from sight of heaven.
Save where the darkness of the grave is deep,
I cannot think to wake on earth or sleep.

ACT V

SCENE I. *An ante-chamber to the drawing-room**Enter ANNE*

ANNE

To bear my death about me till I die
And always put the time off, tremblingly,
As if I loved to live thus, would be worse
Than death and meaner than the sin to die.
The sin to kill myself—or think of it—
I have sinned that sin already. Not a day
That brings the day I cannot live to see
Nearer, but burns my heart like flame and makes
My thoughts within me serpents fanged with fire.
He would not weep if I were dead, and she
Would. If I make no better haste to die,
I shall go mad and tell him—pray to him,
If not for love, for mercy on me—cry
'Look at me once—not as you look at her,
But not as every day you look at me—
And see who loves you, Reginald.' Ah God,
That one should yearn at heart to do or ~~say~~
What if it ever could be said or done
Would strike one dead with shame!

MABEL (*singing in the next room*)

There's nae lark loves the lift, my dear,
There's nae ship loves the sea,
There's nae bee loves the heather-bells,
That loves as I love thee, my love,
That loves as I love thee.

The whin shines fair upon the fell,
The blithe broom on the lea :
The muirside wind is merry at heart :
It's a' for love of thee, my love,
It's a' for love of thee.

ANNE

For love of death,
For love of death it is that all things live
And all joys bring forth sorrows. Sorrow and death
Have need of life and love to prey upon
Lest they too die as these do. What am I
That I should live? A thousand times it seems
I have drawn this flasket out to look on it
And dream of dying, since first I seized it—stole,
And Arthur never missed it. Yet again
The thought strikes back and stabs me, what are
they,
What are they all, that they should live, and I
Die? Arthur told me, surely, that this death
Was pangless—swift and soft as when betimes
We sink away to sleep. If sin it is,
I will die praying for pardon : God must see
I am no more fit to live than is a bird
Wounded to death.

Enter SIR FRANCIS, SIR ARTHUR, *and* FRANK

SIR FRANCIS

Well, Anne, and could you rest
Well after murdering Mabel? Here is Frank
Declares his crimes would hardly let him sleep :
While he who made you criminals appears
Shamelessly happy.

FRANK

Redgie always was
Hardened : the plays he used to improvise
At school were deep in bloodshed.

SIR ARTHUR

Let us trust
That happiness and age may make his Muse
Milder.

ANNE

I am sure I hope so. It was hard
To find yourself so wicked.

SIR FRANCIS

Hard on you,
Certainly. Were you tired?

ANNE

Why? Do I look
Tired?

SIR FRANCIS

Well, not tired exactly ; still, your eyes
Look hot and dull.

ANNE

All eyes cannot be bright
Always, like Reginald's and Mabel's.

SIR ARTHUR

Ah,
It does one good to see them. Since the world
Began, or love began it, never was
A brighter pair of lovers. What a life
Will theirs be, if the morning of it mean
Really the thing it seems to say, and noon
Keep half the promise of it !

FRANK

That it should,
If they get only their deserts : they are,
He the best fellow, she the best girl born.

SIR FRANCIS

You're not a bad friend, Frank, I will say.

ANNE

He is not.

No.

SIR FRANCIS

What your father would have said
To my approval of the match, perhaps
It's best not guessing : but the harshest brute
That ever made his broken-hearted ward
The subject or the heroine of a tale
Must, I think, have relented here.

SIR ARTHUR

But still
We are none the less your debtors—Redgie and I.
It lays on me an obligation too,
Your generous goodness to him.

SIR FRANCIS

No, none at all.
I would not let the youngster tell me so.

Enter REGINALD and MABEL

So, you can look us in the face, my boy,
And not be, as you should, ashamed to see
How much less happy are other folk than you?
Your face is like the morning.

REGINALD

Does it blush?
You'd see I was ashamed then.

MABEL

What, of me,
Redgie? It's rather soon to say so. Still,
It's not too late—happily.

SIR FRANCIS

Nothing can
Happen that does not fall out happily,
It seems, for you—and nothing should, I think,
Ever. Come with me, Frank : I want you.

FRANK

Why?

SIR FRANCIS

I never thought you quite so dull till now.
Come. [*Exeunt* SIR FRANCIS and FRANK.]

SIR ARTHUR

Take me with you : I'm superfluous too.
[*Exit.*]

MABEL

Don't you go, Anne.

ANNE

I will not if you wish.

MABEL

I do, and so does Redgie. We have seen
These last few days as little of you, you know,
As if you had been—well, anywhere.

ANNE

Except,
Remember, at rehearsals ; and last night
We came against each other on the stage.

MABEL

Indeed we did. Is that a property
You have kept about you?

ANNE

What? where? this—ah no,
A—something for a touch of cold I caught
Last night—I think at least it was last night.
Arthur prescribed it for me.

MABEL

Let me taste.
I am hoarse—I am sure I must be hoarse to-day
With rattling out all Redgie's rant—much more
Than you did.

ANNE

No : you do not want it.

MABEL

Anne !

ANNE

You cannot want it, Mabel.

MABEL

How can you
Know? Don't be positive—and selfish.

ANNE

There—

Take it. No—do not taste it, Mabel.

MABEL

Look,
Redgie, how strange a pretty colour ! Why,
One wants a name to praise it—and it smells
Like miles on miles of almond-blossom, all
Condensed in one full flower. If this had been
The poison Anne and you prepared for me,
I really would have taken it last night
And not pretended, as I did, to sip,
And kept my lips dry. [*Drinks.*

REGINALD

Does the flavour match
The colour ?

MABEL

It's a sweet strange taste. Don't you
Try : you won't like it.

REGINALD

Let me know, at least.
[*Drinks.*

ANNE

You do not yet : or do you now know ?

MABEL

Anne!

What have we done—and you? What is it?

ANNE

Death,

Mabel. You see, you would not let me die
And leave you living.

MABEL

Death? She is mad—she is mad!

Reginald, help us—her and me—but her
First.

REGINALD

I can hardly help myself to stand.
Sit you down by me.

ANNE

Can the sun still shine?

I did not mean to murder you.

MABEL

And yet

We are dying, are we not—dying?

ANNE

I meant

To die, and never sin again or see
How happy past all dreams of happiness
You, whom he loved, and he, who loved you, were.

Re-enter SIR FRANCIS, SIR ARTHUR, *and* FRANK

SIR FRANCIS

We are here again, you see, already. Why,
What strange new tragic play is this you are all
Rehearsing?

ANNE

Mabel, if you can forgive,
Say so. I may remember that in hell.

MABEL

I do. And so does Redgie. But you might
Have spared or saved him.

ANNE

How, and let you die?

REGINALD

Ah, how? She did not mean it.

ANNE

Forgive me? And do you

REGINALD

Surely. I am one with her,
And she forgives.

SIR ARTHUR

They are dying indeed. And she
Has killed them.

REGINALD

No. She did not mean.

MABEL

Indeed,
She did not.

SIR FRANCIS

God in heaven ! What dream is this ?

ANNE

God help me ! But God will not. I must die
Alone, if they forgive me. I must die. [*Exit.*

REGINALD

It was a terrible accident, you see—
Was it not, Mabel ? That is all we know.

MABEL

All.

FRANK

Redgie, will you speak to me ?

REGINALD

Good night,
Frank—dear old Frank—my brother and hers. And
you,

Good night, dear Arthur. Think we are going to
see

Our mother, Mabel—Frank's and ours.

MABEL

I will.

But, Reginald, how hard it is to go !

REGINALD

We have been so happy, darling, let us die
Thinking of that, and thanking God.

MABEL

I will.

Kiss me. Ah, Redgie !

[*Dies.*

REGINALD

Mabel ! I am here. [*Dies.*

SIR ARTHUR

They could have lived no happier than they die.

MARINO FALIERO

A TRAGEDY

DEDICATION

TO AURELIO SAFFI

I

YEAR after year has fallen on sleep, till change
Hath seen the fourth part of a century fade,
Since you, a guest to whom the vales were strange
Where Isis whispers to the murmuring shade
Above her face by winds and willows made,
And I, elate at heart with reverence, met.
Change must give place to death ere I forget
The pride that change of years has quenched not yet.

II

Pride from profoundest humbleness of heart
Born, self-uplift at once and self-subdued,
Glowed, seeing his face whose hand had borne such part
In so sublime and strange vic'ssitude
As then filled all faint hearts with hope renewed
To think upon, and triumph ; though the time
Were dense and foul with darkness cast from crime
Across the heights that hope was fain to climb.

III

Hope that had risen, a sun to match the sun
That fills and feeds all Italy with light,
Had set, and left the crowning work undone
That raised up Rome out of the shadow of night :
Yet so to have won the worst, to have fought the
fight,
Seemed, as above the grave of hope cast down
Stood faith, and smiled against the whole world's
frown,
A conquest lordlier than the conqueror's crown.

IV

To have won the worst that chance could give, and
worn
The wreath of adverse fortune as a sign
More bright than binds the brows of victory, borne
Higher than all trophies borne of tyrants shine—
What lordlier gift than this, what more divine,
Can earth or heaven make manifest, and bid
Men's hearts bow down and honour? Fate lies hid,
But not the work that true men dared and did.

V

The years have given and taken away since then
More than was then foreseen of hope or fear.
Fallen are the towers of empire : all the men
Whose names made faint the heart of the earth to
hear
Are broken as the trust they held so dear
Who put their trust in princes : and the sun
Sees Italy, as he in heaven is, one ;
But sees not him who spake, and this was done.

VI

Not by the wise man's wit, the strong man's hand,
By swordsman's or by statesman's craft or might,
Sprang life again where life had left the land,
And light where hope nor memory now saw light :
Not first nor most by grace of these was night
Cast out, and darkness driven before the day
Far as a battle-broken host's array
Flies, and no force that fain would stay it can stay.

VII

One spirit alone, one soul more strong than fate,
One heart whose heat was as the sundawn's fire,
Fed first with flame as heaven's immaculate
Faith, worn and wan and desperate of desire :
And men that felt that sacred breath suspire
Felt by mere speech and presence fugitive
The holy spirit of man made perfect give
Breath to the lips of death, that death might live.

VIII

Not all as yet is yours, nor all is ours,
That shall, if righteousness and reason be,
Fulfil the trust of time with happier hours
And set their sons who fought for freedom free ;
Even theirs whose faith sees, as they may not sec,
Your land and ours wax lovelier in the light
Republican, whereby the thrones most bright
Look hoar and wan as eve or black as night.

IX

Our words and works, our thoughts and songs turn
thither,

Toward one great end, as waves that press and roll.
Though waves be spent and ebb like hopes that wither,
These shall subside not ere they find the goal.

We know it, who yet with unforgetful soul
See shine and smile, where none may smite or strive,
Above us, higher than clouds and winds can drive,
The soul beloved beyond all souls alive.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

MARINO FALIERO, *Doge of Venice.*

THE DUCHESS, *his wife.*

BERTUCCIO FALIERO, *nephew to the Doge.*

BENINTENDE, *Grand Chancellor.*

SER MICHELE STENO.

SER NICCOLÒ LIONI.

The Admiral of the Arsenal.

FILIPPO CALENDARO.

BERTUCCIO ISRAELLO.

BELTRAMO, *a follower of Lioni's.*

Lords, Ladies, Senators, Officers, Guards, and Attendants.

Scene, VENICE.

Time, 1355.

ACT I

SCENE I. *The balcony of the ducal palace overlooking
the Piazza San Marco*

MARINO FALIERO *and the* DUCHESS, *seated : Lords,
Ladies, and Attendants behind : among them* SER
MICHELE STENO *and* SER NICCOLÒ LIONI.

FALIERO

The sun fights hard against us ere he die.
Canst thou see westward ?

DUCHESS

Not the huntsmen yet.

FALIERO

Nay, nor the bull, belike : but ere they come
There should be stirring in the crowd far off :
Some wind should wake these waters, and some wave
Swell toward us from the sunset : but the square
Seems breathless as the very sea to left
That sleeps and thinks it summer. Thou shalt know
Full soon if love and liking toward mine own
Have made mine old eyes blind or wrecked the wits
That once were mine for judgment.

DUCHESS

Nay, my lord,

I doubt not—nor did ever—

FALIERO

Nay, my love,

But thou didst never trust : I say, my son,
My brother's born, made mine by verier love
Than every father bears his own, shall find
For manfulness and speed and noble skill
No master and no match of all his mates
In all the goodliest flower of lordliest youth
That lightens all this city. Dost thou think
The day's chase shall not leave him spirit and strength
To dance thy merriest maidens down to-night
Even till the first bell ring the banquet in ?
Nay, we shall find him as thy sire and I
Were fifty years or sixty since, when life
As glad and gallant spurred our light strong limbs
As quickens now these young men's toward the chase
That knits their thews for battle.

DUCHESS

How the sun

Burns, now so near the mountains ! even at noon
It smote not sorer.

FALIERO

Old men set not so.

A goodly grace it were to close up life
And seal the record fast of perfect days
If we might save one hour of strength and youth

To reap and be requickened ere we die
With royal repossession of the past
For sixty sovereign heartbeats pulsed of time,
And with one last full purple throb let life
Pass, and leave death's face glowing : yet perchance
It should but seem the harder so to die.
This is no festal fancy : but thy brow
Is graver than the time is. Art thou not
Weary ?

DUCHESS

Not yet : nay, surely, no.

FALIERO

Thy smile
Is brighter than thy voice.

DUCHESS

My heart may be
More light than rings my tongue, since neither knows
A cause to teach it sadness.

STENO

Did you mark
That ? *[Aside to the lady next him.]*

LADY

What ? no, nothing, I.

STENO

She knows no cause :
What cause of sadness may so fair a face

STENO

Respect !

Nay, I revere you more than mine own heart,
Which rests your servile chattel : for myself,
I know not aught worth reverence in me, save
Love,—love of one too sweet and hard, that wears
A flower in face, at heart a stone, and turns
My face to tears, my heart to fire, and laughs
As loud for scorn as men for mirth who look
To see the duke's brave nephew bring him back
For gift and trophied treasure of the chase
A broad bull's pair of—tributes.

LIONI

Hark you, sir :

Speak lower : and speak not here at all.

STENO

St. Mark !

Art thou my tutor ?

LIONI

Ay—to whip thee dumb,
Or strike thy folly dead at once. Be still,
For shame's sake—not for honour's would I bid
Thee.

STENO

While this lady's eyes regard us, dumb
I will be : but hereafter—

LIONI

Be but now

Silent : I bid thee now no more : but this
Thou shalt be.

STENO

See now, sweet, what friends he hath,
Our good grey head of Venice ! if one speak
At hunting-time of horns or tusks or spoil
That hot young hunters laugh at, straight they cry,
Peace, and respect, and spare our master. Christ !
What friends ! were I fourscore, and thou—thyself,
Wouldst thou be half so good a friend of mine ?
Ha ? Nay, but answer—nay, thou shalt.

LADY

I will
Once, and no more. Keep silence : and forget
If ever word of such a tongue as thine
Found audience of me.

STENO

Am I then indeed
Fourscore, that I should not remember ? Ha !
Nor woman am I, to forget—but some
Love dotards more than men.

LADY

Who loves not men
May love such things as grovel of thy kind,
And deem such love not monstrous.

STENO

Nay, but this
Asks answer of man's lips—not of his tongue—
Nay !

FALIERO

Who is there that knows not where he is
And dreams the place a brothel? Gentlemen,
If here be any, need is none to bid
You spurn him out of sight.

LIONI

Go ; if thou hast
Or shame or sense, abide not here till men
Hurl thee with fists and feet away.

STENO

By God,
I will be—God forsake me else—revenged.
Sirs, lay not hand upon me. *[Exit.]*

FALIERO

Dear my child,
Thine eyes are still set sunwards : hast thou heard
Nought of this brawl?

DUCHESS

I would not.

FALIERO

Thou dost well
God knows, no base or violent thing should come,
Had I God's power, in hearing or in sight
Of such as thou art.

DUCHESS

Then were earth too soft
For souls to look on heaven ; but what I may
I would eschew of meaner knowledge.

FALIERO

God

Guard thee from all unworthy thee, or fit
For earthlier sense than feeds thy spirit and keeps
Heaven still within thine eyeshot. Dost thou see
There, in that fiery field of heaven that fades
Beyond the extremest Euganean, aught
Worth quite the rapture of those eyes that yearn
Too high to look on Venice?

DUCHESS

Sir, methought

We were not worthy—nor was ever man
Made in God's loftiest likeness—even to see
Such wonder and such glory live and die.

FALIERO

And yet we live that look on it. This sight
Is verily other far than we beheld
When first October brought thy husband back
From Romeward, here to take on him the state
Wherein we now sit none the lower or less
For the ominous entrance to it. I never saw
A noon so like a nightfall : that we breathe
Unwithered yet of wicked signs, and see
The world still shine about us, might rebuke
All fearful faith in evil.

DUCHESS

Yet was that
A woful welcome : all about the prow
Darkness, and all ahead and all astern
And all beside no sign but cloud adrift,
All blind as death and bitter : and at last—
I would not bring it on your memory back
Who fain would cast it out of mine.

FALIERO

At last
To land between the columns where they die
Whom justice damns by judgment. Nay, are we
Traitors or thieves or manslayers, that the sign
Should make us wan with forethought? This fore-
told,
If aught foretell men aught, that he who came
Should bring men equal justice ; do them right,
Or die—as gladlier would I die than stand
In equal eyes of equitable men
A judge approved unrighteous. Be not thou
Moved, when the world is gracious and the sun
Speaks comfort, by remembrance of a sign
That lied, and was not presage. We came in
Darkling : and lo now if this earth and sea
Be not as heaven about us, and the time
Not more elate with fair festivity
Than should our hearts be—yea, though nought were
here
Save this bare beauty shown of wave and sky
To lift them up for love's sake. Has the world.
Think'st thou, so good a gift as this to give
Men's eyes that know not Venice?

DUCHESS

Nay : but you,
Lord of two wives, love least the first espoused
Albeit the younger of them : more than me
You love that old hoar bride who caught your ring
Last autumn, and to-day laughs large and loud
On all that sail or swim : you dare not say
You have not loved her longest.

FALIERO

But I dare
Swear, though no little thing this be to swear
For one whose heart and hand, whose praise and pride,
Were still mine old Adriatic's, mother and wife
And wellspring of mine honour, that I love
Not her nor heaven nor Venice more than thee
Whose laughter mocks us and whose lip maligns ;
Nay, not so much, thou knowest, were I not old
Or thou not young, I would not fear to say,
As now, lest youth reprove mine age of love
And shame chastise it for infirmity,
And thou—but in thine heart, I think, there lurks
No thought that should reprove it or chastise
With less than tender laughter ; though, being old,
The sea be meeter for my bride, and show
A wrinkled face with hoary fell that seems
More like mine own than thou canst show me.

DUCHESS

How
Man's courtesy keeps time with falsehood, though
Truth ring rebuke unheeded ! Look, my lord,
How the sea bids the sun and us good night,

With what sweet sighs and laughter, light and wind
Contending as they kiss her, till the sigh
Laugh on her lip, and all her sunward smile
Subside in sighing to shoreward : will you say
God hath not given you there a goodlier bride
Than his who mates with woman ?

FALIERO

She is fair—

Heaven, in our dreams of heaven, not fairer ; nay,
The heaven that lends her colour not so fair,
Being less in men's eyes living : but in thee,
Were even thy face no fairer found than hers,
There sleeps no chance of shipwreck. See, they come,
The hunters with their trophies, and in front,
If the sun play not with an old man's eyes,
My boy it is that leads them.

DUCHESS

And unhurt.

[*Voices below*: Long live Faliero ! live Bertuccio long !

DUCHESS

God and St. Mark be praised for all !

FALIERO

Nay, child,

Wouldst thou make him a child or girl, to thank
God that he bears him like a man and takes
No hurt for lack of skill or manfulness

In young men's craft or pastime ? Welcome, sirs ;
Well done, and welcome. Hither, son, to me.

Enter BERTUCCIO and Hunters

Give this good lady thanks, who hath at heart
Such care of thee she might not choose but doubt
If manhood were enough in heart of thine
Or strength in hand for sportful service.

DUCHESS

Nay ;

I said so never.

BERTUCCIO

Sir, my thanks to both.
We have seen good sport ; but these my friends, who
lay
The hunt's main honour on my single hand,
Malign themselves to praise me.

FALIERO

Yet for that
Thy cheek need put not on the dye wherewith
The sunset's flag now hoisted strikes twice red
These westward palace-columns. Come : the dance
Will try thy mettle till the first bell sound
And bid the banquet in. A fairer night
Spring could not send us. Come beside me : so.

[*Exeunt.*

Must all men think the man born prince or churl
Whom wrath or lust or rancorous self-regard
Drives past regard of honour.

STENO

Look you, friend :
What, think you, shall these all men think, who
read

Writ up to-morrow on the ducal seat,
The throne of office, this for epigraph—
'Marin Faliero of the fair-faced wife :
He keeps and others kiss her'—eh? or thus—
'Others enjoy her and he maintains her'—ha?

LIONI

Thou art not such a hound at heart : thy tongue
Is viler than thy purpose.

STENO

Wilt thou swear
This? Vile—why, vile were he that should endure
Insult; not he that being offended dares
Take insolence by the beard—be it white or black—
And shake and spit upon it. Ay? by God!
Back turned and shoulder shrugged confute not me :
Abide awhile : be dawn my witness : wait,
And men shall find what heart is mine to strike,
What wit to wound mine enemy : meet me then,
And say which fool to-night spake wiselier here.

[Exeunt severally.]

ACT II

SCENE I. *An apartment in the ducal palace*MARINO FALIERO *and the* DUCHESS

FALIERO

It does not please thee, then, if silence have
Speech, and if thine speak true, to hear me praise
Bertuccio? Has my boy deserved of thee
Ill? or what ails thee when I praise him?

DUCHESS

Sir,

How should it hurt me that you praise—

FALIERO

My son,

Mine, more than once my brother's : how, indeed?

DUCHESS

Have I the keeping of your loves in charge
To unseal or seal their utterance up, my lord?

FALIERO

Again, thy lord ! I am lord of all save thee.

DUCHESS

You are sire of all this people.

FALIERO

Nay, by Christ,
A bitter brood were mine then, and thyself
Mismated worse than April were with snow
Or January with harvest, being his bride
Who bore so dire a charge of fatherhood.
Thou, stepmother of Venice? and this hand,
That could not curb nor guide against its will
A foot that fell but heavier than a dove's,
What power were in it to hold obedience fast,
Laid on the necks of lions?

DUCHESS

Why, men say
The lion will stoop not save to ladies' hands,
But such as mine may lead him.

FALIERO

Thine? I think
The very wolf would kiss and rend it not.

DUCHESS

The very sea-wolf?

FALIERO

Verily, so meseems.

DUCHESS

For so the strong sea-lion of Venice doth.

FALIERO

This is a perilous beast whereof thou sayest
So sweet a thing so far from like to be—
A horrible and a fiend-faced shape, men call
The lion of the waters.

DUCHESS

But St. Mark
Holds his in leash of love more fast, my lord,
Than ever violence may.

FALIERO

By heaven and him,
Thy sweet wit's flight is even too fleet for me :
No marvel though thy gentle scorn smite sore
On weaker wits of younglings : yet I would,
Being more my child than even my wife to me,
Thine heart were more a sister's toward my son.

DUCHESS

So is it indeed—and shall be so—and more,
The more we love our father and our lord,
Shall our two loves grow full, grow fire that springs
To Godward from the sacrifice it leaves
Consumed for man's burnt-offering.

FALIERO

What ! thine eyes
Are very jewels of even such fire indeed.
I thought not so to kindle them : but yet
My heart grows great in gladness given of thine
Whose truth in such bright silence as is God's
Speaks love aloud and lies not.

DUCHESS

No, my lord.

FALIERO

It is not truth nor love then, sweet my child,
That lightens from thine eyeshot ?

DUCHESS

Yea, my lord.

FALIERO

I grow less fond than foolish, troubling thee,
Who yet am held or yet would hold myself
Not yet unmanned with dotage. Sooth is this,
I am lighter than my daily mood to-day
And heedless haply lest I wrong mine age
And weary thine with words unworthy thee
Or him that would be honoured of the world
Less than beloved—with love not all unmeet—
Of one or twain he loves as old men may.
Bertuccio loves me ; thou dost hate me not
That like a frost I touch thy flower, and breathe
As March breathes back the spirit of winter dead
On May that dwells where thou dost : but my son

Finds no more grace of thee to comfort him
Than April wins of the east wind. Wot thou well,
The long loose tongues of Tuscan wit would cast
Ill comment on this care of mine to bring
More close my wife's heart and my son's, being
 young,
And I a waif of winter, left astrand
Above the soft sea's tidemark whose warm lip
Is love's, that loves not age's : but I think
We are none of those whose folly, set in shame,
Makes mirth for John of Florence.

DUCHESS

By God's grace,

No.

FALIERO

And by grace of pure Venetian pride
And blood of blameless mothers. By St. Mark,
Shame, that stings sharpest of the worms in hell,
Seems, if those light-souled folks sing true, to them
No more a burning poison than the fly's
We brush from us, and know not : but for men .
The eternal fire hath no such fang to smite
As this their jests make nought of. Life is brief—
Albeit thou knowest not nor canst well believe,
But life is long and lovesome as thine age
In vision sees it, and in heart uplift
Plays prelude clear of presage—brief and void
Where laughing lusts fulfil its length of days
And nought save pleasure born seems worth desire ;
But long and full of fruit in all men's sight
Whereon the wild worm feeds not, nor the sun

Strikes, nor the wind makes war, nor frost lays hold,
Is the ageless life of honour, won and worn
With heart and hand most equal, and to time
Given as a pledge that something born of time
Is mightier found than death, and wears of right
God's name of everlasting.

DUCHESS

Child I am,
Or child my lord will call me, yet himself
Knows this not better, holds no truer this truth,
Nor keeps more fast his faith in it than I.

FALIERO

No need thy tongue should witness with thine eyes
How thine heart beats toward honour. Blind were he,
And mad with base brainsickness even to death,
Who seeing thee should not see it. Those Florentines
With names more gracious than their customs crown
Glad heads of graceless women ; jewelled names
That mock the bright stone's fire of constant heart,
Diamante, Gemma ; thine, were thine as these,
Might dare the vaunt unchallenged : such a name
Is in those eyes writ clear with fire more keen
Than ever shame bade shine or sin made burn
Where grace lay dead ere death. How now, my son ?

Enter BERTUCCIO

BERTUCCIO

Most noble uncle—

FALIERO

Nay, but art thou mazed ?
No reverence toward our lady, nor a look
Save as of one distraught with fear, whose dreams
Are still as fire before his eyes by night
That leaves them dark by daytime ? Yestereve,
Hadst thou so looked upon the bull, by Christ,
Thou hadst come not home his conqueror.

DUCHESS

Sir, perchance
Your nephew with your grace would speak alone.

BERTUCCIO

Ay, madam.

FALIERO

Nay, sir. Why, what coil is this ?
Thine eyes look scarce half drunken, but thy speech
Is thicker than with wine.

DUCHESS

Good day, my lords.

FALIERO

Pass out of earshot if thou list, but pass
—I pray thee, sweet !—no further.

[*Duchess withdraws.*

Now, my son,
If nought bemuse thy brain or bind thy tongue,
Speak.

BERTUCCIO

Sire, I may not.

FALIERO

God consume thee ! nay,
But bring thy wits back healed—what dost thou then
Here?

BERTUCCIO

What must needs, in my despite and thine,
Be done, and yet should be not. None but I
Dare tell my sire that Venice rings and roars
Aloud with monstrous mockery whence our name
Is rent as carrion by the vulturous beaks
That feed on fame and soil it. Sir, it were
A shame beyond all treason for my lips
To take this taint upon them : read, and see
What all have seen that in thine hall of state
Since dawn have entered, on thy sovereign seat
Nailed up in God's defiance and ours, a lie
That hell would hear not unrebuked, nor heaven
Endure and find no thunder.

[Gives a paper to Faliero.]

FALIERO

God us aid !

Why, if the pageant match thy prologue, man,
The stage should shake to bear it.—Body of God !
What?

DUCHESS

Sir ! my lord !

BERTUCCIO

Forbear him.

FALIERO

Does the sun
Shine?—Did he smite me on the face?

DUCHESS

Who?

FALIERO

He.
[*Pointing to Bertuccio.*]

DUCHESS

What have you given him?

BERTUCCIO

Ask not.

FALIERO

Let me think—
Art not thou too Faliero, and my son?

BERTUCCIO

Ay.

FALIERO

By the glory of God in heaven, I swear,
I think not as I thought it.

BERTUCCIO

Then your thought
Errs, and the mind whose passion brings it forth
Strays far, and shakes toward ruin.

FALIERO

It may be so,
Sir ; it may be so.

DUCHESS

Heaven have pity on all !

FALIERO

Madam, what man is this that speaks to me ?

DUCHESS

My lord your nephew.

FALIERO

Thine ? thy lord is this ?
Thy man ? thy master ?

BERTUCCIO

Sir, bethink you—

FALIERO

Ay—

I will bethink me surely. Fair my wife,
I pray you pardon mine unreverend age,

Shamed as it stands before you—spurned, and made
A thing for boys to spit at. In my sight,
I pray you, do not smile too broad at it.
White hairs, if he that bears them bear my place,
Are held, I know, unvenerable of all.
Fair sir, you are young, and men may honour you :
Tell me, who am blind, how I should bear myself
In the eyes of men who see me that I see
Nothing.

DUCHESS

O God, be pitiful !

BERTUCCIO

My lord,
Refrain yourself ; you stagger toward the pit
Whose gulf is madness ; gather up your heart ;
Give not all rein to rage.

FALIERO

I will not, sir.
There was a noise of hissing in mine ears ;
I could not hear you for it ; and in mine eyes
Blank night, and fire, and blindness. Now I see
The leprous beggar whom the town spits out
Hath more than I of honour. Many a year
I have dreamed of many a deed that brought not
shame,
Not shame at all, but praise : these were not mine,
I know them now, they were not : mine have earned
For the utmost crown and close of all my life
Shame. I would know, were God not stricken dumb,
What deed I have done that this should fall on me.

BERTUCCIO

My lord—

FALIERO

Thy servant's servant, and a dog.
Yet art thou, too, vile ; nay, not vile as I,
But baser than a beaten bondman.

BERTUCCIO

Sir,
If madness make you not a thrall indeed,
But reverence yet claim reverence, take some thought
Not for yourself, nor me.

FALIERO

Dost thou desire
So much for her sake of me ? Son of mine,
Look well upon thy father : let mine eyes
Take all the witness of the spirit in thine,
That I may know what heart thou hast indeed.
Bertuccio, if thine eyes lie, then is God
Dead, and the world hell's refuse.

BERTUCCIO

Sire and lord,
If ever I have lied to you, I lie
Now.

FALIERO

I believe thou liest not. Mark me, son,
This is no little trust I put in thee,

Believing yet, in face of this I read,
That man or God may lie not.

BERTUCCIO

Speak to her.

FALIERO

Take comfort, child : this world is foul, God wot,
That gives thee need of comfort.

DUCHESS

I have none—
No need, I mean—if nought fare ill with you.

FALIERO

Much, much there is fares ill with all men : yet,
With thee, if righteousness were loved in heaven,
Should nought at all fare ill for ever. Sweet,
As thou wouldst fain, if thou couldst ever sin,
Find for that sin forgiveness, pardon me.
I am great in years, and what I had borne in youth,
Not well perchance, yet better, now, being old,
I cannot bear, thou seest, at all. For this
Forgive me : not with will of mine it was
That thus I scared so sore thy harmless heart.
Speak to me not now : ere this hour be full,
It may be we may speak awhile again
Together : now must none abide with me. [*Exit.*

DUCHESS

What have they said?

BERTUCCIO

Ask never that of man.

DUCHESS

What have they said of me ?

BERTUCCIO

I cannot say.

DUCHESS

Thou wilt not—being mine enemy. Why, for shame
You should not, sir, keep silence.

BERTUCCIO

Yet I will.

DUCHESS

I never dreamt so dark a dream as this.

BERTUCCIO

God send it no worse waking.

DUCHESS

Now I know
You are even indeed her enemy, who believed
She had never so deserved of you. I have
No friend where friends I thought were mine, and find,
Where never I thought to find them, enemies.
Whence

Have I deserved by chance of any man
That he should be mine enemy ?

BERTUCCIO

If I be,
 I would not strike you shamefully at heart,
 But rather bear a bitterer blame than this
 Than right myself with doing you wrong. Would God
 Your enemies and mine uncle's all were I !

DUCHESS

Do you know them—these—what manner of men they are?

BERTUCCIO

Save as I know that hell breeds worms and fire,
No.

DUCHESS

Have I merited these? Have we that loved,
Have we that love, in God's clear sight or man's,
Sinned?

BERTUCCIO

Nay, not thou, if heaven by love for earth
Sins not : if thou, then God in loving man
Sins.

DUCHESS

Nay : for yet you never kissed my lips.
That day the truth sprang forth of thine, I swore

It should not bring my soul and thine to shame.
And thou too, didst not thou, for very love,
Swear it?

BERTUCCIO

And stands mine oath not whole?

DUCHESS

Give God

Honour, who hath kept in us our honour fast.
Whatever come between our death and this,
For that I thank him.

BERTUCCIO

Ah, my love, my light,
Soul of my soul, and holier heart of mine,
Thee, thee I thank, that yet I live, and yet
Love, and yet stand not in all true men's eyes
Shamed. Am I pure as thou, that save through thee
I should be found no viler than I am?
Hadst thou been other, I perchance, God knows,
Had been a baser thing than galls us now.

DUCHESS

Ay! but I knew it or ever I wrung it forth—
Me then they smite at, and my lord in me,
Who have smitten him so sorely?

BERTUCCIO

Dear, how else?

When seemed our sire a furious weakling, made
For any wind to work upon and wrest

Awry with passion that had struck no root
Deep even as love or honour ?

DUCHESS

Woe is me !

Would God I were not !

Re-enter FALIERO

FALIERO

Pray thou no such prayer :
I heard that cry to Godward : call it back.
My faultless child, if prayer seem good to thee,
Pray : but for nought like death. And doubt thou not
But yet thou hast given me daily more good things
Than God can give of evil ; nor may man,
Albeit his fang be deadlier than the snake's
And strike too deep for God or thee to heal,
Undo the good thou didst, or make a curse
Grow where thou sowedst a blessing. Go in peace ;
And take with thee love's full thanksgiving. Go.

DUCHESS

My father, and my lord !

FALIERO

My child and wife,
Go. *[Exit DUCHESS.]*

Now to thee, son. When thou gavest me this,
I do not ask thee if thou knewest the man.
It were impossible, out of reach of thought,
That mine own brother's and mine own heart's child
Should give it me, and say—I know the man ;

Thy sire indeed mad with more monstrous wrong
Than yet bows down his head dishonoured. Swear.

BERTUCCIO

What ?

FALIERO

That albeit his life lay in thine hand
Thou wouldst not bruise it with a finger.

BERTUCCIO

Sir,

How can I ?

FALIERO

Sir, by God, thou shalt not choose.
Art thou the hangman ?

BERTUCCIO

If the knave perchance

Be noble ?

FALIERO

Dost thou mock thyself and me ?
Noble ?

BERTUCCIO

My lord, I would not wrong the worst
Of all that wrong the names they wear : but yet
I cannot see in Venice one save one
Who might, being born base, and of no base name,
Conceive himself so far your enemy.

FALIERO

Boy,
What knowest thou of their numbers that have cause,
Being vile to hate me? Hath my rule not been
Righteous?

BERTUCCIO

That stands not questionable of man.

FALIERO

How then should more not hate than love me? Child,
Child!

BERTUCCIO

But a man's wrath strikes more straight, my lord,
How vile soe'er, than toward a woman. This—
This is a dog's tooth that has poisoned you :
And yestereve a dog it was you bade
Spurn out of sight of honour.

FALIERO

Steno?

BERTUCCIO

He.

Else am not I Faliero.

FALIERO

Then—I say,
Then,—be it so,—what wouldst thou do? Being my
son,
What wouldst thou dream or do, this being so?

BERTUCCIO

Why,
With God's good will and yours, and good men's leave,
Hew out his heart for dogs to gnaw. Might this
Displease you?

FALIERO

Why then yet is this to do?

BERTUCCIO

Forgive me, father, and God forgive me : this
I am all on fire with shame to have spoken of
And think the man lives while I prate. But you
Know, and our Lord God knows, it is but now,
Now, even this instant breath of imminent time,
That I have guessed this.

FALIERO

Ay ; we know it well ;
We, God and I.

BERTUCCIO

And both of you give leave—
Or leave I crave of neither—pardon me,
But leave I crave not to set heel on him.

FALIERO

God gives not leave ; and I forbid thee.

BERTUCCIO

Then,
In God's teeth and in yours, I will, or God

Shall smite me helpless by your hand. My lord,
You do but justice on me, so to seem—
I would not say, to dwell in doubt of me.
I should have passed ere this out of your sight,
Silent.

FALIERO

Thou shouldst not. Is this burden sore
That as thou sayest God lays on thee, or I,
To be as I am patient?

BERTUCCIO

Fain would I
Be, would God help me, even as you—were you
As I now stand, though shamefaced, in your sight.

FALIERO

Ay—you are young and shamefaced—I am old,
And in my heart the shame is. But your face
Hath honour in it—and what have I to do,
What should I do with honour? Thou dost make
Of mine more havoc and less count of me
Than yet mine enemies have, to take this charge
Upon the personal quarrel of thine hand,
Unchartered by commission.

BERTUCCIO

And of me,
My lord, of me what make you? How shall men
Not spit when I pass by, at one that had
Nor heart nor hand, eye to behold nor ear
To hear the several scoffs, by glance or speech,

That base men cast on us? Nay, then what right
Had I to call any man base that lives
Or any worm that stings in secret? Sir,
Put not this shame upon me : when have I
Deserved it? Why, a beaten dog, a slave
Branded and whipped by justice, durst not bear
For very shame's sake, though he know not shame,
So great dishonour.

FALIERO

Thou shalt bear it, son.

BERTUCCIO

I will not.

FALIERO

Son, what will is this of thine
To lift its head up when I bid it lie
And listen while mine own, thy father's will,
Speaks? How shalt thou that wilt not honour me
Take in thine hand mine honour? Mine, not thine,
Not yet, I tell thee, thine it is to say
Thou shalt or shalt not strike or spare the stroke
That is to make my fame, if hurt it be,
Whole. I, not thou, it is that heads the house
And bears the burden : I, not thou, meseems,
It was that fought at Zara. Nay, thine eyes
Answer, an old man then was young, and I
That now am young then was not : nor in sooth
Would I misdoubt or so misprize thee, boy,
As not to think thou hadst done as gladly well
As I that service, had it lain in thee,
Or any toward our country. But myself

Am not so bowed and bruised of ruinous time,
Not yet so beaten down of trampling years,
That I should make my staff or sword of thee,
And strike by delegation. On the state
Is laid the charge of right and might to deal
Justice for all men and myself and thee
By sovereignty of duty ; not on us
Lies of that load whereto the law puts hand
One feather's or one grain's weight. More : did we
Take so much on us of the general charge,
We were not loyal : and the dog we strike
Were yet, though viler than a leper's hound,
No viler then than we, who by God's gift
Being born of this the crown of commonweals,
Venetian, so should cast our crown away
That men born subject, unashamed to be
Called of their king subjects, might scoff at us
As children of no loftier state than theirs.
For where a man's will hangs above men's heads
Sheer as a sword or scourge might, and not one
Save by his grace hath grace to call himself
Man—there, if haply one be born a man,
Needs must he break the dogleash of the law
To do himself, being wronged, where no right is,
Right : but as base as he that should not break,
To show himself no dog, but man, their law,
Were he, that civic thief, the trustless knave
Who should not, being as we born masterless,
Put faith in freedom and the free man's law,
Justice, but like a king's man born, compelled
To cower with hounds or strike with rebels, rise
And right himself by wrong of all men else,
Shaming his country ; saying, ' I trust thee not ;
I dare not leave my cause upon thine hand,

Mine honour in thy keeping lies not sure ;
I must not set the chance of my good name
On such a dicer's cast as this, that thou
Wilt haply, should it like thee, do me right.'
No citizen were this man, nor unmeet
By right of birth and civic honour he
To call a man sovereign and lord : nor here
Lives one, I think, so vile a fool as this.
For me, my faith is in the state I serve
And those my fellow-servants, in whose hands
Rests now mine honour safe as theirs in mine.
Which trust should they redeem not, but give up
In mine their own fame forfeit, this were not
Venice.

BERTUCCIO

But if perchance the thing fall out?
If some be peradventure less than thou
Venetian, equal-souled and just of eye,
Must our own hands not take our own right up?
If these abuse their honour, and forbear,
For love's or fear's sake, justice?

FALIERO

If the sun

Leap out of heaven down on the Lido there
And quench him in Giudecca. [Rises.

BERTUCCIO

Sir, but then—

FALIERO

I charge thee, speak thereof to me no more. [Exeunt.]

SCENE II. *The Piazzetta*

Enter STENO, meeting LIONI and BELTRAMO

STENO

What says our Lioni now ? hath he not heard
Nor seen if we lack heart or wit to strike ?
Eh ! what saith wisdom ?

LIONI

What indeed to thee
That art a knave and liar, a coward and fool ?
Nothing.

STENO

God's blood, sir !

LIONI

For thy veins have none :
A beggar's trull breeds nobler brats than thee.
I bid thee, ser Michele, know me not.

STENO

Well—but I bear such jests not every day ;
Thou knowest me that I do not.

LIONI

Hound, be hence ;
And let a man draw breath unplagued of thine.

STENO

Art thou my nobler ?

LIONI

Fool, the beasts are that.
Wilt thou not leave this air taintless of thee ?
Wouldst thou be whipped—save of the hangman ?

STENO

What !

LIONI

Strike him, Beltramo.

BELTRAMO

Sir, by Christ, not I :
I am not of that office.

STENO

No, thou knave.
Thine hand against a noble !

BELTRAMO

Not mine hand,
Surely ; but say my foot should strike a liar,
The blow should do his dogship honour : yea,
Were all high titles gilt about his head,
Scarce were he worthy to be spurned of me.

STENO

Dost thou not hear then, Lioni, how thy knave
Dishonours thee, doing me dishonour ?

LIONI

Man,
—All true men pardon one that calls thee so !—
Leave us, or I will do my face the shame
And thine the great and yet unmerited grace
To spit upon thee.

STENO

Christ ! the men are mad.
Well, yet, God save and keep you !

LIONI

Ay, from thee.
[*Exit* STENO.]

BELTRAMO

I would the Doge bore such mind as yours.

LIONI

Thou knowest he bears a nobler.

BELTRAMO

This I know,
His blood is more intemperate than the sea
When red Libeccio takes it : half a sting
Will ravage all the channels of its course
With fever's furious poison : and this worm
Hath shot the sting into his heart.

LIONI

Can I
Help him ? or thou, friend, heal it ?

BELTRAMO

No, my lord.

Would God—

LIONI

And what wouldst thou with God ?

BELTRAMO

Alack,

What no man born, I doubt, may get of God
Whom he hath bidden in all this age of ours
Be born as I am.

LIONI

And how wouldst thou be born ?

BELTRAMO

Even thine and all men's equal.

LIONI

Ay, good friend ?

Why, now you thou me ; being a noble too,
What could my malcontent do more ?

BELTRAMO

My lord,

I trust and think, being noble as you, I were not
Less malcontent than now, being but by blood
Your footboy's fellow-citizen and yours.

LIONI

Ay? Well, a brave man, were he seven times king,
Is but a brave man's peer : so be it : but God
Unmake me that I am and make me vile
If I conceive, were I and thou, man, mates,
What then should discontent thee.

BELTRAMO

Why, to you
The slight thing then still fretting half my heart,
The secret small snake-headed thing, should seem
Nothing ; yet me not all alone it frets,
Galls no more mine than many a man's heart else,
That any man should bear of any man
Wrong, or that right should hold not equal rule
On one as on another.

LIONI

Doth it not
Here?

BELTRAMO

No, my lord : nor elsewhere on earth.

LIONI

Why, then, God help thee, why should this forsooth
Vex thee, or them whose thought keeps tune with
thine,
More than it preys on others?

BELTRAMO

Ask of God

That ; some he bids not bear what others may—
Or haply may not all their patient lives
With pulseless hearts endure it.

LIONI

God us aid !

Thy riddles ring no merrier, man, to me
Than that foul fool's uncleaner japes than thine.
What gadfly thought hath stung thee ?

BELTRAMO

Truth, my lord ;

Or call it pity—or call it love of right—
Malice, or covetousness, or envy—nay,
But I, howe'er men turn it, call my thought
Truth.

LIONI

Be thou ne'er so strong to dive, thou shalt not
Pluck up from out the shadow where she sleeps
Truth : and for justice, if she keep not here
Her sovereign state and perfect kingdom, where
May man take thought and find her ? Pity—nay,
But if our hearts should bleed but one thin tear
For each wrong known and each we know not of,
A day would drain them dry of blood. But what
Hath all our will and all our impotence,
Though this be strong as that is all too sure,
To do with him we spake of—be it for hurt
Or healing ? Didst thou call on God to change

For him the face and fashion of the law
Whereby the world steers toward some end, and
holds
Some heart up yet of comfort ?

BELTRAMO

Surely, no.
I did but think what good might come of ill
If this great wrong should smite a heart as great
With sense of other and older wrongs than this
Done toward no viler nor more abject hearts
Nor heaped on heads more worthy shame and scorn
Than age or place, fame of high deeds, desert,
Or pride, hath made Faliero's.

LIONI

By this light,
I think the heat it sheds hath even as wine
Dazzled thy brain to darkness. How should this
Do thee or any man good, that thy lord,
My lord and thine, an old man full of days
And full of honours, being than all of these
Himself more honourable, should take by chance
A buffet from a fool's hand on his cheek,
Or spittle from a fool's mouth on his beard,
And hardly bear to bear it ? Who shall reap
What harvest hence ?

BELTRAMO

Nor you, sir, know, nor I ;
But haply—so priests lie not—God.

LIONI

May he

Bind up thy brain with comfort ere it sweat
Forth of thy scalp with fever ! Mark me, friend,
Thou dost thyself, being honest, no small wrong
To let such worms for sloth's sake feed on it.
I love thee, knowing thee valiant,—yea, by Christ,
I lie not, saying I love thee—and therein
If haply I deserve again of thee
Love, let me rather bid thee than beseech
Pluck all such thoughts up by the root, and take
Good counsel rather than intemperate care
Of what beseems not nor besteads thee. So
God give thee comfort and good day. Farewell.

[Exeunt severally.]

ACT III

SCENE I. *An apartment in the ducal palace*

FALIERO and BERTUCCIO

FALIERO

Did not I charge thee think no more such thoughts
Or seal them up in silence? Wouldst thou make
Honour, that here hath station if on earth,
Dishonourable? for so to deem or doubt
Of men set highest in Venice or the world
Were no less insolent madness than to make
Thy mother's couch a harlot's. Hast thou seen
More days than I, that what I think to see
Thou, thou shouldst hold for questionable? I know
That God put nought of traitor nor of fool
In the essence of thy spirit: else—pardon me,
My brother! I might hold this child of thine
Less than should be thy children.

BERTUCCIO

That, my lord,
I would not be—God spare me that; I think
That unrebuked your brother's son may say
Nor foe nor friend hath yet so found him.

FALIERO

No ;

I have known thee honourable all thy brief life through
As they that founded us our house, and sure
As mine own sword here to my hand is : hence
It is that harshlier I rebuke thee not,
Misprizing thus thy lordliest elders. Well—
Meseems the message tarries that should bring
Their sovereign sentence to us : the cause, I thought
Should need nor bear a long debate : but just
It is that justice should not mix with rage
Her purity of patience : let them weigh
My worth against my wrong ere judgment speak,
And both against the wrongdoer : I were found
Even all too much a soldier, and my state
For me no fitter than for thee, should wrath
Distract my trust and reverence toward the law
And toward their hands that wield it : as indeed
It doth not—nay, it could not though I would
And though it could I would not give it leave.

Enter an Officer

OFFICER

Health from the senate to the Doge I bring,
And this their sentence.

FALIERO

Give me this in brief.

Ay—thou, Bertuccio.

BERTUCCIO

Bid this man begone.

FALIERO

Why? Hast thou read already?

BERTUCCIO

Sir, by heaven

I pray you bid him go.

FALIERO

Ay?—Leave us, friend.

[Exit Officer.]

Now, man, what is it?—I would not call thee boy,
Fluttering and faltering with so changed a cheek
Above thy task—but read.

BERTUCCIO

I dare not.

FALIERO

Ay?

BERTUCCIO

I dare not, and I will not.

FALIERO

Dost thou dare

Be called a coward?

BERTUCCIO

Ay. No. I cannot tell.

Mine eyes were troubled, or my brain is touched.

FALIERO

By Christ, I think so. Give it me.

BERTUCCIO

My lord,

I cannot.

FALIERO

Cannot—will not—dare not? Hark,
Boy ; though thou find me patient, be not thou
Frontless, and light as riotous insolence.
Read.

BERTUCCIO

Sir, you bade me give it in brief.

FALIERO

By God,
I think the boy makes mirth of it. Read, or speak.

BERTUCCIO

Michele Steno stands condemned—

FALIERO

To death?

Exile? God smite thee !

BERTUCCIO

Had he struck me dumb,
It scarce were harder for my tongue to say
No.

FALIERO

Ah ! perpetual prison ?

BERTUCCIO

 If two months,
With one year's after exile from the state,
Be held so much in Venice.

FALIERO

 Or two days—
Why not two hours ? Thou liest ?

BERTUCCIO

 I did not think
To hear that question ever, and reply,
Would God I did.

FALIERO

 Thou didst not think ? Who heeds
What thoughts were thine ? I think this is not
 night
Wherein I walk through such a monstrous dream.

BERTUCCIO

Day be it or night or twilight, sire of mine,
Two months it is that by these grave men's doom
On whose high-hearted honour hangs our own
The dog must lie in durance.

FALIERO

Son, I think
Thou liest not, but for shame's most piteous sake
Wilt lay but half the truth upon thy tongue.
On : when the date is out, the man released
Shall take my seat, and I the foulest knave's
That bleeds and swelters in the galleys. Nay,
Spare me not this : read.

BERTUCCIO

Father, not for heaven,
God knows, though heaven stood open, would I dare
Let one reproachful shadow of casual thought
Fall toward you—but would God you had given my
hand
Freedom, or I not asked it ! Mine, my fault
It is that shame besets us—cursed was I
To leave brute chance and men's malignities
Occasion so to smite our honour. Now
Two months must drain themselves away to death
Before the tongue be plucked out of his throat.

FALIERO

Nor now nor then nor ever now need that
Be. My good son, I give thee kindly thanks
—And noble thankfulness thou art worthy of—
That thy forbearance more than my desert
Withholds thy tongue from revel in rebuke,
Thy lip from smiles, thine eye from triumph ; this
Would no man else, I doubt, forbear save thee,
Being wise and young, seeing one so grey in years

So witless and so vain of spirit and weak,
So confident and very a fool as now
The man men called Faliero. Thou alone,
Thou, only thou in Venice, wouldst, I think,
So spare and so forbear me. God requite
Thy reverence and thy gentleness of heart
Not as he now requites my pride and faith,
My faith and trust in others.

BERTUCCIO

Father! O,
Would God I had wronged them as they wrong thee
now
And stood before them shamed and abject!

FALIERO

Peace.

Here is no matter more for words or tears
Bring me my wife—thy sister—hither.

[*Exit* BERTUCCIO.]

Ay,

Fourscore full years—and this the crown of them?
And this the seal set on mine honours? Why,
Had I deserved this,—were it possible
That man could ever have merited of the state
This, and that such a man, being born, could be
I,—this were yet unpardonable and vile
In them to deal such justice.

Re-enter BERTUCCIO *with the* DUCHESS

Now, my child,
How fares it with thee?

DUCHESS

Peace be with my lord !

FALIERO

Heaven be with hell, say : for so far apart
Peace and thy lord stand each from other. Thou—
With thee how fares it ?

DUCHESS

Ill because of thee ;
Well for mine own part.

FALIERO

Verily so I think ;
Ill fares it with thee for an old man's sake,
By the old man's fault, who by thyself shouldst fare
Well.

DUCHESS

Sir, you know me, whether such a thought
Touched ever with unnatural thanklessness
And tainted so my spirit.

FALIERO

Unnatural ? No :
For thanklessness was never unnatural yet.
But thou, what thanks, my daughter, owest thou me
Who have made thee not my daughter ? Had I given
Thine hand for love's sake, ay, for love's, away,
Then thankless wouldst thou be to thank me not.
Now—

DUCHESS

Dear and gracious ever have you been
Toward all found worthy grace and goodness : me
You have crowned and clothed with honour, being
your wife :
And toward your country—

FALIERO

Good : forget not her.

DUCHESS

Toward this most glorious country given of God
For man's elect, his chosen of men, to serve,
No son more glorious hath done service.

FALIERO

—Found

More acceptable or worthier this reward.
Nay, stint not so thy speech : make on : thou sayest
None hath deserved—what guerdon?—more than I.

DUCHESS

My lord, was this then wrought for recompense ?
For guerdon is it we serve our country ? This
Meseemed her highest reward of service done,
The grace to serve her.

FALIERO

God's best grace and hers
For fourscore years I have held it : now I hold

A harlot's kiss, a hangman's wage, more high,
More precious gains and worthier good men's care,
Than grace to serve my country.

DUCHESS

Dear my lord,
And wherefore ? not through wrath and hate of me,
Which might so much distemper and disease
The raging blood and brain of violent men
Fast bound with iron bands of honour and law
To women less than woman, that the world
Might seem to them for shame's sake blackness, day
Night, and faith dust, and love's face monstrous : yet
Should this not leave them dead in trust of heart
Toward motherhood and manhood, as are they
Whose hearts cast off their country : were I vile,
My shame could shame not Venice : but your heart,
Being clear of doubt as mine of shame, can hold
No thought more worthy than a poisonous dream
That so should feed its fever. If I be not
Vile, but in God's and man's eyes and in yours
Clean as my mother bare me clean of sin
Such as makes women shameful—then, though earth
Were full of tongues that cried on me, what hurt
Were this to you or God in heaven or me
If we no more than God permit the snake
To hurt the heel he hisses at, but shoots
No sting through flesh untainted ? Were the world
Full of base eyes and tongues, ears quick to catch
Evil, and lips more swift to speed it, how
Should this make vile what were not ? You it is, -
My lord it is who wrongs me, to require
Revenge for that which if it need revenge
None ever can wash out : but if it need

None, being an emptier thing than air, the wrong
Were done of him that held it worth revenge.

FALIERO

Thou art high of heart, my child—as children may
Be, and men may not.

DUCHESS

Sir, but may not men
Learn if they list of children? Not of me
Would I desire you, but of Christ, to learn
Forbearance.

FALIERO

Christ was no man's lord on earth,
No woman's husband.

DUCHESS

God in flesh was he.

FALIERO

Yea ; and not I.

DUCHESS

Nay, but his servant.

FALIERO

Yea.

Venetian born, Christian baptized, and duke
Crowned : and a man grown grey in toil of arms ;
And profitable in service ; and a slave
Whom all he served may spit on. That were nought.
On thee for my sake may they.

DUCHESS

No, my lord :
On some base thing they call me, which is not
I.

FALIERO

Girl, who put so great a heart in thee?

DUCHESS

The man who hath shown me honour all my life.
Faliero.

FALIERO

None of him shall learn it more.

DUCHESS

Sir, all men shall that ever hear of him
So noble, and nobler therefore than were he
Who had held it needful on so vile a wrong
To set some seal of honour by revenge.

FALIERO

Of me thou sayest not this. I am not the man.

DUCHESS

If God give ear to prayer, thou shalt be.

FALIERO

Ay—

If that which is not be, and that which is
Be not, I shall be : this I doubt not of.

DUCHESS

My lord, am I then other, or yourself,
Because of tongues that if they smote a serf
Would seem not worth our heeding?

FALIERO

No, and ay.

The serf should heed not, nor for his sake we.
But—Child, it may be this has made me mad.
All day remembrance rides me, and by night
Bestrides and jades my brain, as though some bell
Rang right above my head violently struck
With pealing pulse of hammers: and in sleep
Some shame I know not seems to close me round
Cloudlike, and fasten on me like a fire,
And clothe me like a garment; and it seems
Though God were good as thou, righteous and kind,
He could not help me, heal my hurt, undo
This evil men have done me, till myself
Know and take heart and kill it and be healed.
I am old, thou seest, I am old. God comfort thee
Who art not as I am, passionate and infirm:
Me shall he never.

DUCHESS

Sir, not God nor man
But only passion bred and fed of pain
Turns your fair strength to faint infirmity
By night nor day, with dream nor reason. Is it
Less praise, less honour, less desirable,
To be reviled of hissing things whose souls
Are wingless worms and eyeless, than to have

Love, thanks, and reverence, of all souls alive
Worth reverence, thankfulness, or love? Doth hell
Give God less praise than heaven, blaspheming him
With tongues whose praise would hail him fit for hell?
Did vile men praise us, we might loathe ourselves
More than repentance yet bade ever man,
More than though good men blamed.

FALIERO

Ay, like enough.

Thou hast a child's cheek and a wise man's tongue.
'Tis seventy years since I was called a child—
And wise man was I never. Hark thee, boy :
Thou art even as I was, loyal : now take note,
By me take note, and warning : turn thine heart,
Turn back thy face from honour ; change, and thrive :
Learn wisdom of a fool : be not abashed,
Forsaking all thy father taught or I,
All counsels and all creeds wherewith, being fools,
We filled thee full of folly : one that bears
Fourscore years' weight of veriest foolishness
So counsels and so charges thee. Bow down,
Down lower, if aught be lower, than lies the dust
That soils men's feet save when they tread on men
As these our masters now on thee and me
And on my brother dead, thy father. Take
All buffets of all heels thou darest not bite
As one that thanks his chastener : let thy lip
Kiss every hand whence with some loathliest lie
Thy tongue may wrest forth wages : let thy name
For cowardice ring recorded more of men
Than ours for faith did ever : come there war,
Peril, or chance of evil against the state,
Make thyself wings, take to thee gold, begone,

Fly : strike no stroke, nor seem but fain to strike ;
Haste, let the foe not find thee tarrying, run,
Cover thine head and hide thee : so shalt thou
Deserve, if man of Venice may deserve,
Honour.

BERTUCCIO

My lord and sire !

FALIERO

Forget those names.
There lives no title or note of fatherhood
More venerable than sound the shivering bells
That fringe a jester's cap ; no lordship now
That shines too sure and high for shame to soil
On heads less base than Steno's.

BERTUCCIO

Hear me, sir.

FALIERO

Who art thou that I should hear thee ? Do men hear
Me ? But whate'er thou be thou art more than I ;
Men call not thee the vilest name they can,
Doge.

BERTUCCIO

The noblest yet of earth's it were,
Would he that bears it but be strong in scorn
Of things less worth his rage than once the foes
Who found him strong in action.

FALIERO

Had I wist,
Who am now not strong, thou seest, save only in
speech,
And even in speech time-stricken—had I wist,
When for this Venice I smote Hungary down
And of her fourscore thousand gave a tithe
For crows to rend at Zara—when meseemed
I fought for men that made our commonweal
A light in God's eye brighter than the sun,
That then I fought for Steno—Speak not thou ;
I know thee, what thou wouldst, with leave, forsooth,
Say : but for these that fence him round I fought ;
For these that brand me shameful for his sake,
For these that set their seal upon his words,
For these that find them worth so soft rebuke
As might a sire lay on his long-tongued child
Who prattles truth untimely—boy, for these
I fought, and fought for Steno.

Enter an Attendant

ATTENDANT

Noble sir,
The admiral of the arsenal desires
Audience.

FALIERO

A man requires, thou sayest, of me
Audience? The world breeds yet, come rain or sun,
Fools—how should liars and knaves else live, or God
Be served and worshipped of the world? My lord,
Admit him.

ATTENDANT

Sir !

FALIERO

Thou art not Venetian ?

ATTENDANT

Yea—

As sure as you chief prince in Venice.

FALIERO

Then,

Wert thou the lowest that welters out of life
Down in the Wells till death remember him,
Thou art master and lord and sovereign over me.
If I may pray thee do me so much grace
As not to smite me therefore on the cheek,
I would desire thee give thy fellow lord
Admittance to your servant. *[Exit Attendant.]*

Thou, my boy,

Go. Whatsoe'er from Venice come to me,
From Venice, earth, or heaven, can be but now
Insult ; and thou, being loyal, and a fool—
Kind, and my brother's issue—fain would I,
Being foolish too, and kindly, fain I would
Thou didst not see it. Go thou, my love, with him.
Peace be with both. *[Exeunt Duchess and Bertuccio.]*

Enter the Admiral of the Arsenal

ADMIRAL

Health to the Doge ! Sir,
I pray you look but on my face.

FALIERO

It bleeds.

Thy brows are sorely bruised. Art thou come here
For surgery?

ADMIRAL

Yea, by furtherance of your grace
To find my fame a surgeon.

FALIERO

Fame? what is it?

The word is not Venetian, sir; it means
Honour.

ADMIRAL

Toward whom then should I turn in trust
Save toward our highest in honour?

FALIERO

Be it enough

Thou art found a brawler: being a soldier, man,
Be not a jester too.

ADMIRAL

By neither name,
Sir, am I known in Venice. As yourself
Are honourable and a righteous man in rule,
I pray you not but charge you do me right.

FALIERO

Or wilt thou have me pluck the sun from heaven
And put it in thine hand? Nay, that were nought;

The sun, though save by sight we touch it not
Nor save in thought come near it, yet in heaven
By sight and thought we reach and find it there,
And here by good works done on earth ; but where,
And by what sign, in Venice or on earth,
Honour ?

ADMIRAL

I crave no more than right.

FALIERO

No more ?

Strange temperance and strange modesty in man
To crave no more than what, for all we see,
Not God's almightiness hath power to give—
Or else our less than righteous God lacks grace,
And hath not heart to do it. What wrongs are thine?
At least I have thus much more of grace than God,
That I will hearken if not help thee.

ADMIRAL

Sir,

There came but now to the arsenal a man— [*Pauses.*

FALIERO

And smote another on the face—is this
Thy wrong ? Thou canst not see the shame on mine
That thou shouldst make thy plaint of this. Look
here—

Seest thou no sign in flesh and blood that saith
What hands have buffeted me ?

ADMIRAL

My lord, my lord,
It is not I who am wronged of these your jests,
But you much more in honour.

FALIERO

That being nought,
Dead, rotten, if the thing had ever life,
I am nowise touched at all. But heed not me :
I had no mind to wrong thee. On.

ADMIRAL

This man,
Being noble, of the seed of Barbaro,
Required of service to be done for him
The masters of the galleys ; I being by
Made answer for mine officers and thine,
This could not be : whereon we fell to words ;
He chid my duteousness in office there
As toward his place undutiful, and I
Rebuked his rank for insolence : he thereat
Spake not again, but smote me with his hand
Clenched, and the jewel thereon that loaded it
Hath writ his wrath where each man's eye may read
That sees mine own yet blind with blood.

FALIERO

What then ?

ADMIRAL

Why, this then, if your grace love righteousness
More than reproach of men for mad misrule—
Justice.

FALIERO

Come hither—here, beside me. Look
Northwestward, by St. Mark's, athwart the light.
Seest thou that beggar there asprawl and stark
Who seems to soil the sunshine where he lies?

ADMIRAL

Ay, my lord.

FALIERO

Ask of him to help us both.

ADMIRAL

My lord, the temper of your angry wit
Seems wild and harsh to mine.

FALIERO

Seem all things not
To wise men wild as madness, harsh as hell
To men that ever think on heaven? Thou knowest—
Nay, then, thou knowest not how they deal with me
Who are lords of ours, who hold us in their hands,
Who bid us be and be not. This at least
Thou hast heard—no gondolier but sings it, none
But laughs at large who listens—this ye know,
What manner of wrong was done me late, of whom,
And toward what judgment answerable he stands
Who doth me, being too weak to right myself,
Wrong. Answer not: I did not bid thee say
Thou knowest, for mine own shame's sake, and for
thine
I would not hear thee swear thou knowest it not.
Now, even this hour, the sentence comes to me

Given on my wrongdoer by our lords of law
Whose number makes up half my fourscore years.
Man, what had thine been?

ADMIRAL

What but death?

FALIERO

Indeed?

Death? Is it possible or believable
There lives a man that is no kin to me
Who holds mine honour worth the washing? Friend,
These men, born high, have doomed this high-born
man
To lie secluded two close months in ward
And walk again forth freely.

ADMIRAL

Will your grace

Endure it?

FALIERO

Seest thou not how patiently?
Have all their forty buffets on this face
Raised blood enough to blush with?

ADMIRAL

Good sir duke,

If you be minded verily for revenge,
These husbands and these sons of harlots, callèd
Nobles—these lineal liars whose tongues thrust out
Lap blood, lick dust, or lisp for lewdness—these
Whose mirth, whose life, whose honour hath for root
Adultery—these that laugh not save at shame,
But turn all shame to laughter—these our lords

May find a lord who need but lack the will
To hew them all in pieces.

FALIERO

Ay, my friend?

ADMIRAL

Sir, were you mine and theirs who are friends indeed
With all that groan and yearn, despair for shame,
Wax mad in hope—with all whose bloody sweat
Anoints and sleeks and supples and makes fat
Our lusty lords in Venice—this might be
Surely.

FALIERO

But now didst thou rebuke me—yea,
For mockery chidd'st thou me: what words for this
Shall I find fit to chide thee?

ADMIRAL

Nay, my duke,
What words or stripes may please you: shame on me
Can work no further now nor heavier wrong:
But, holding me herein a liar or mad,
You give truth's self and your own soul the lie
If hope or faith or yearning or desire
Be verily in your soul toward vengeance.

FALIERO

If
God's will be strong, man's will be weak, and good
Be not more vile than evil—if hate or love,
Wrath, shame, or righteousness, be anything,
Or aught at all be more than nothing, then

Much more than vengeance I require ; and yet
Desire beyond all else desirable
Vengeance. If these who have wronged me, being
wiped out,
May leave this Venice with their blood washed white,
Clean, splendid, sweet for sea and sun to kiss
Till earth adore and heaven applaud her—then
Shall my desire, till then insatiable,
Feed full, and sleep for ever.

ADMIRAL

Sir, do you
Set but your hand with ours to it, and the work
Is even half wrought already.

FALIERO

What are they
Who have in hand so high a work, and bid
Mine own take part and lot with theirs therein ?

ADMIRAL

My faith in yours needs not assurance ; yet
Must none unpledged have knowledge of it, or take
Our lives in keeping : therefore, ere I speak,
Swear.

FALIERO

Wiser men should bear thy charge than thou :
Swear ? If thou lack assurance of me, friend,
What oath of force may give it thee ? If by God
I swear, being one that might, unsworn to God,
Betray thee, will my treasonous tongue be tied,
Think'st thou, by fear of God, not fearing shame ?

Were oath or word worth half a grain of dust
If, save for fear of hell and God, I durst,
Or would, albeit God's tongue should bid me, lie?
Or if by Venice, shall my faith to her
Not bind me, being unsworn, to faith with you
If well ye will toward Venice—and if ill,
What oath could pledge me to this breach of oath,
The mere misprision of your treason—me,
Who stand for Venice here, in all time's sight,
To Godward and to manward answerable?
Or by mine honour would you bind me fast
To abstain from that which could I dream to do
My soul were with Iscariot's fast in hell
Now while my body yet should walk the world
And make the sun ashamed to cast on earth
The shameful shadow of such a soulless thing
Spared by sheer scorn of Satan's and of God's,
Rejected of damnation? He that swears
Faith toward his fellow bids him note and heed
That faith is none within him, seeing his word
Wants worth and weight which if it want indeed
No heavier oath than ever shook the soul
With thunder and with terror and with air
Can add or cast upon it.

ADMIRAL

On your soul

Then be it, sir.

FALIERO

Yea, friend: be it on mine and thine.
And now, as I and thou are faithful men,
Speak.

ADMIRAL

Sir, albeit as yet conspiracy
Be shapeless as a shadow, this dark air
Breeds not beneath our iron heaven of rule
Clouds charged with less than lightning ; men there
are
Whose hate and love toward freedom and toward
shame
Are full as even your own great heart of fire.
With such if you would commune on this cause,
Two might I now bid hither ; a seaman tried,
Filippo Calendaro, swift of hand
And stout of heart as is his comrade wise
And keen of spirit and craft in wiles of war,
Bertuccio Israello : these, by secret word
Being called to counsel, shall not fail at need
To give us note whom else to take in trust
As in this cause auxiliaries.

FALIERO

Therein

Lord nor lieutenant nor subordinate
Should any be, but equal all in heart
And all in station as in action all
Equal : for if in heart we be not one
How shall not each loose limb of our design
Rot, and relax in sunder ? Not allies,
Auxiliaries nor seconds we require,
But single-souled sons of one mother born
And brothers one in spirit ; born as Christ
Of this pure virgin's womb, the commonweal's,
Whom fools and slaves would fain make false and foul,
Being bastard-hearted, though true-born : but she

Knows shame no more than them she knows, whose
souls

Were shapen as for service of a king,
Not citizen, but subject. Bid our friends
Hither : but ere you go, I pray you call
My nephew to me.

ADMIRAL

Sir, God give you grace
To take this cause upon you ; if he give,
No name that ever grew a star shall burn
Too high for yours to shine by.

FALIERO

This perchance
May and perchance may be not : God's own hand
Holds fast all issues of our deeds : with him
The end of all our ends is, but with us
Our ends are, just or unjust : though our works
Find righteous or unrighteous judgment, this
At least is ours, to make them righteous. Go.

[*Exit Admiral.*]

What sentence shall be given on mine ? Of man,
As ill or well God means me, well or ill
Shall judgment pass upon me : but of God,
If God himself be righteous or be God,
Who being unrighteous were but god of hell,
The sentence given shall judge me just : for these
Who are part and parcel of my shame and theirs
Defile not nor disgrace me, whom they spurn
And smile and spit on, but their country : nay,
Nor only this, but freedom, duty, right,
Honour, and all things whence the unlikeness lives

Of commonwealths and kingdoms ; all whence grows
The difference found of man whose brow fronts heaven
And beast whose eye seeks earthward—citizen
Whose hand implores a grace from no man's hand,
And thrall whose lip craves pardon if it smile.

Re-enter BERTUCCIO

How farest thou now, boy? When I bade thee hence,
It was to spare thee sight and share of shame
I thought should fall upon me : but I knew
Thou wouldst have borne therein thy loyal part,
And eased, if pain of thine or love might ease,
My sufferance of mine own. Behold me now :
What seest thou ? rage, or shame, or pride, or fear,
Or what vile passion else ?

BERTUCCIO

Dear father, none,
As never yet man saw nor man shall see
A sign on that the noblest face alive
Dishonourable.

FALIERO

Nor aught untimely ? nought
Strange ? For the world is other with me, boy,
Than when we parted.

BERTUCCIO

Sir, I dare not say,
Not though the word seem written on your brow,
Triumph—nor, though this lighten from your eye,
Joy.

FALIERO

Yet, by Christ's own cross, my brother's child,
Thou shouldst not lie to say so.

BERTUCCIO

What good hap
Hath brought them back whence late by men's
default
Such looks, long natural there, were banished?

FALIERO

Son,
A poor man's wrong and mine and all the world's,
Diverse and individual, many and one,
Insufferable of long-suffering less than God's,
Of all endurance unendurable else,
Being come to flood and fullness now, the tide
Is risen in mine as in the sea's own heart
To tempest and to triumph. Not for nought
Am I that wild wife's bridegroom—old and hoar,
Not sapless yet nor soulless. Well she knows,
And well the wind our brother, whence our sails
Went swollen and strong toward Istria, that her
head
Might bow down bruised with battle, and yield up
Its crested crown to Venice—well the world
Knows if this grey-grown head and lank right hand
Were once unserviceable : and she, my wife,
The sea it is that sends me comfort, son,
Strength, and assurance of her sons and mine,
Thy brethren, here to stablsh right for wrong,
For treason truth, for thraldom like as ours

Freedom. But thou, so be it the wind and sun
That reared thy limbs and lit thy veins with life
Have blown and shone upon thee not for nought—
If these have fed and fired thy spirit as mine
With love, with faith that casts out fear, with joy,
With trust in truth and pride in trust—if thou
Be theirs indeed as theirs am I, with me
Shalt thou take part and with my sea-folk—aye,
Make thine eyes wide and give God wondering
 thanks
That grace like ours is given thee—thou shalt bear
Part of our praise for ever.

BERTUCCIO

Praise or blame,
And ruinous fall or radiant rise, for me
With you shall be as one thing. I am yours.
The man I am you made me, and may shape
The man I shall be.

Re-enter the Admiral, with CALENDARO and ISRAELLO

FALIERO

Welcome, sirs ; ye find
A fellow-servant, and your comrade now
In fellowship of wrong, not hopeless yet
To call you, if your will stretch wing with mine,
Friends, citizens, and brethren. This our friend
Hath given you by my charge to know of me
Thus much, that if your ends and mine be one,
As one our wrongs are, and this people's need
One, toward the goal forefelt of our desire

No heart shall beat, no foot shall press, no hand
Strain, strive, and strike with steadier will than
mine

And faith more strenuous toward the purpose. This
If ye believe not, here our hope hath end ;
If ye believe, here under happier stars
Begins the date of Venice.

CALENDARO

I believe

Not more in God's word than in yours ; and this
Not for your station's sake, nor yet your fame's,
How high soe'er the wind of war have blown
The splendour of your standard : but, my lord,
Your face and heart and speech, being one, require
Of any not base-born and servile-souled
Faith : and my faith I give you.

ISRAELLO

Sir, and I,
Who know as all men know you wise in war,
Put trust in wisdom tried so long, and found
So strong for service ever.

FALIERO

Then, no more
Hath hope so high as ours is need of words
To rear it higher or set more steadfast. This
Remains, that being in purpose strong to strike
We take but counsel where and how the stroke
May sharpest fall and surest. Sirs, for me
In all keen ventures tried of strength and chance

The briefest rede and boldest hath been best.
We, that would purge the state of poisoned blood,
Need now but mark its hour for blood-letting,
And where to prick the swollen and virulent vein
That feeds most full this deep distemperature
Whence half the heart of Venice rots. These men
That steer the state with violent hand awry—
These rather that bind fast the steersman's hand,
Baffle and blind him, while the veering stem
Reels deathward—they or she must utterly
Perish: the wind blows higher through this red
 heaven

Than when a ship may save herself, yet fling
Less by the board of all her lading, now
Found worthless, than may lighten her indeed.
What think you? may this plague be thoroughly
 purged,

And one of these our lords who trample us
Live? Are ye men that take this burden up,
And think with half a hand to bear it through
Or wear it like a feather? If ye will,
Ye may be free, red-handed from revenge,
Or keep white hands, be slaves, and slumber: I
Will serve no more, nor sleep dishonoured.

CALENDARO

Sir,

For one wrong done you, being but man as we,
If wrath make lightning of your life, in us,
For all wrongs done of all our lords alive
Through all our years of living, doubt you not
But wrath shall climb as high toward heaven, and
 hang
As hot with hope of thunder.

ISRAELLO

Not to me

Can justice ever seem too just, or steer
Too straight ahead on vengeance : but we need
The helmsman's eye to run before his hand,
The captain's tongue to bid us whither.

FALIERO

You,

Sir admiral, spake but late of one to me
Who lacking not the will should lack not power
To carve this monstrous quarry limb from limb
And give its flesh for beasts less vile to feed ;
Spake you not somewise thus ?

ADMIRAL

Ay, verily—seeing

Heart, as I deemed, in you, sir, toward the work ;
And, seeing it yet, still say so.

FALIERO

Men have seen

Worse, and have rashlier spoken, yet have won
Praise for sharp sight and judgment. Friends, me-
seems

Yet none of you will say that in this cause
We lack no larger counsel than our own,
No further scope of foresight, though the path
Be ne'er so strait and secret : foot and eye
Must keep, for all this close and narrow way,
The vantage yet of outlook far and free
Lest in the darkness where our snares are set
Ourselves be trapped as wolves by twilight.

ADMIRAL

Sir,

Some six or seven I wot of, being called in
To single counsel severally, shall give
Each man, so please you, judgment on the mean
That may be found for present action.

FALIERO

This

The rudest march of rough-shod strategy
Could push not past and miss it, that we need
Ere noon or night may crown conspiracy
Not six or seven to post about the squares
But some sixteen or seventeen chiefs elect,
With each some forty swordsmen at his back
Well weaponed and arrayed, but held in doubt,
Even till the perfect hour strike, on what end
Their enterprise is bent and bound : and these,
When dawns the night or day determined, shall
At signal given fall here and there in fray,
With stormy semblance made of casual strife
To right and left enkindling : so shall I
Find instant cause or plea to bid the bells
Toll summons from St. Mark's, and they thereon
To press from all sides in and every street
Down toward the church ; where, finding these our
 lords
And all chief ministers of the common wrong
Who stand chief princes of the common weal
Drawn forth by fear together to demand
Whence thus leaps forth such riotous noise by night,
Full may they fall upon them unaware
And drive on heaps and slay them.

BERTUCCIO

Sir—

FALIERO

What says

Our nephew—sworn so late upon our side
Deep as man's faith may pledge him? Does the
charge
Mislike thee? Didst thou lie, or didst thou not
Swear?

BERTUCCIO

Sir, to no such enterprise I swore
As treads through blood of blameless men towards
ends
Whereof I wist not; nor, though these be pure,
To me may general slaughter seem absolved
Or by their grace transfigured and redeemed
From damnable to righteous. Nay, my lord,
Reply not as your eyes make answer: I
Take back no word of all I said, and now
Reiterate, seeing they need reiteration: nought
That you shall bid me, not though God forbid,
Will I not, if I may, do: but what end,
How high soe'er and single-eyed, can bid
Spill innocent blood, and stand up spotless? Think,
As these men should, being pure of purpose—think
If truth or trust or freedom, righteousness,
Faith, reverence, love, or loyalty, be fruits
That burst or burgeon from so dire a seed
As were in these rebellion, and in you
Treason.

FALIERO

Treason ?

BERTUCCIO

The word should scare you not,
If not this enterprise may scare you.

ISRAELLO

Duke,
Strange ears, it seems, have caught our counsel.

CALENDARO

Peace :

Howe'er the strife of counsels end, we stand
Safe : here is yet no traitor.

BERTUCCIO

He that holds
His life in fear of me may hold it safe
As I will hold mine honour. Sir, what end,
(*To Faliero.*)

Though this device should drink not innocent blood,
And violence fall not save on wrongdoers' heads,
What end shall come of this red enterprise,
What fruit of such a root as bears for flower
Carnage that strikes by midnight ?

ISRAELLO

First for us
Justice, and next for him who doth us right
A crown.

BERTUCCIO

A crown, and justice ? night and day
Shall first be yoked together.

CALENDARO

Truth is that :
If right and wrong engender, they bring forth
No true-begotten offspring.

BERTUCCIO

Sir, can you
Hear and keep silence when a citizen born
Of Venice proffers you for hire of blood,
For price of death dealt and a darkling blow,
Kingship ?

FALIERO

It was not well said—no, nor thought—
Of any, born republican,—albeit
The commonweal be cankered now at core—
That healing even for plaguespots might be found
In such a leper's bed as monarchy
Keeps warm with prostitution, till therein
A people's lifeblood, foul with sloth and shame,
Rot round its heart and perish.

ISRAELLO

I would have you
Reign but as first of citizens, and see
Crowned in your name the people.

FALIERO

Good my friend,
The foulest reigns whence ever earth smelt foul
When all her wastes and cities reeked of Rome
Were by that poisonous plea sown, watered, fed :
The worst called emperors ever, kings whose names
Serve even for slaves to curse with, lived by vote
And shone by delegation. We desire
For all men who desire not wrong to man
Freedom : but save for love's sake and the right's
Freedom to serve hath no man.

ISRAELLO

Love should give
Right to the crowned redeemer of the state
To bid men serve for thankfulness and love
The man who did them service.

FALIERO

And to them
Right to bow down, and serve, and abdicate
Manhood? Not God could give man, though he
would,
Power to do this, and right to live : for they
That so should cast off manfulness, and tread
Their birthright out in blood or trampled mire,
Could claim, being men, but right to kill and die,
Or live, being thralls, as beasts that feed and groan
Till death release them into dust. No more.
To serve and reign for me were shame alike,
And for my masters or my slaves no less,
Inseparable and reverberate, crime from crime
And shame on shame for ever.

ADMIRAL

Sir, well said.

CALENDARO

Ay, and well done : such words are deeds, and wear
Swords girt for service on them.

FALIERO

Yet of these
And all words else enough is ours and more,
If very swords be slower to speak than they.
Ye have my mind, I yours : remains but this,
That each betake him toward his office.

ADMIRAL

Sir,
Farewell awhile we bid you, giving God
Thanks that he gives us and so great a cause
A chief whose heart is great as it.

FALIERO

Farewell.

[*Exeunt Admiral, Calendaro, and Israello.*]
And how may this now please thee ? Have I said
Ill ?

BERTUCCIO

No, my lord.

FALIERO

Or shall not we do well
To raise up Venice from the dust wherein

Men trample down her servants, and to bring
All haughtiest heads and highest of tyrants down
Thither?

BERTUCCIO

My lord, it may be.

FALIERO

Nay, by God,
Thou art older and colder of spirit and blood than I ;
I am hoar of head, but thou, thou art sere at heart,
And grey in soul as fearful forethought makes
Old men whom time bows lowlier down than me.
What yet of this mislikes thee? Wouldst thou make
The rough ways plain for freedom's feet, yet spare
Tyrants?

BERTUCCIO

Of all this blood that shall be shed,
If none indeed be taintless, I would spare
No drop that knows infection : but, my sire,
Who dares say this?

FALIERO

I.

BERTUCCIO

Nay, not you, but wrath,
Your wrath it is that says so.

FALIERO

No : for proof
With iron tongues innumerable echoing me

Cries out upon the house-tops, fills and thrills
Streets, bridges, squares, with shame from roof to
roof

Reverberated resounding as to toll
The deep death-knell of honour. None there is,
Not one that in this wrongdoing bears not part,
Not one but we in Venice, we whose hands
Are pledged to quench in blood this funeral fire
That else will burn up justice, courage, faith,
And leave but shame alive and vileness free
And cowardice crowned as conqueror. Here she lies,
Our mother, mightiest late of all things throned
And hailed of earth as heavenly, naked, soiled,
Mocked, scourged, and spat on : not her first of sons
And not her last escapes, evades, eschews
Communion in one sacrament of shame,
Partakes not, pledges not the wine of wrong,
The bread of outrage : first and last are one :
Bound of base hands down on her pyre alive,
Fast bound with iron and with infamy,
Our commonweal groans, knowing herself a thing
For slaves and kings to scoff at. Shall this be
With thy goodwill for ever ? Not with mine
Shall it ; nay, not though scarce a tithe were left
When justice hath fulfilled her fiery doom
Again to build up Venice.

BERTUCCIO

Who shall build
On graves and ashes, out of fire and blood,
Or citadel or temple ? Where on earth,
For man what stronghold, or what shrine for God,
Rose ever so from ruin ?

FALIERO

Rome—if Rome
Lie not—was built on innocent blood : and here
No fratricidal auspice shall renew
Life, but a sacrificial sign again
Inaugurate Venice for her sons to praise
And all the world to worship. These are not
Brethren, nor men nor sons of men are these,
But worms that creep and couple, soil and sting,
Whose blood though foul shall purge pollution hence
And leave the shore clean as the sea. Would God
Their hour to-night could ere its natural time
Ring from St. Mark's, albeit the bell that struck
Rang me to rest for ever ! I shall sleep
Thereafter, sound as triumph or as death
That strikes, and seals up triumph.

BERTUCCIO

Sir, I know,
If by strange hap my sire could err, with him
For me to err were better, even to death,
Defeat, dispraise, and all that darkens death,
Than swerving from his side to shine, and live
Acclaimed of all men's praises. Be your will
Done : for as God's your will shall be for me
A stronghold and a safeguard though I die.
[Exeunt.]

ACT IV

SCENE I. *A cabinet in the palace of Lioni**Enter LIONI and BELTRAMO*

LIONI

Speak now, then : here at least is none but I.
Speak.

BELTRAMO

Sir, you dream not what you bid me do.

LIONI

By good St. Mark, not I : but this should be
Some honest thing, or hardly wouldst thou dare
So thrust and press upon me.

BELTRAMO

No, my lord.

I doubt it is not.

LIONI

Get thee hence, then : out :
Is there no room for all dishonest works
In all the range of Venice, that a knave

Must make me closet counsellor with him,
Here emptying forth his knavery? By this light,
I think thou art here belated, mad with wine
Or drunk with brawling: yet again I think
Thou dardest not thus abuse me.

BELTRAMO

Sir, I dare
Nor hold my peace nor hardly speak; yet this
I cannot but beseech you to believe,
That if between two doubts I hang distraught
The stronger cause that plucks me by the heart
Is care and duty toward you, born of love;
The weaker, half disrooted now, constrains
My conscience yet for shame's sake; which nathless
I needs must here cast off me. Sir, you know
How yet no long time since it is that we
Communed of matters held for me too high,
Of unendurable evil endured, of wrong
Whence all men's hearts were wasted as with fire,
Of hope that helped not, patience grey with pain,
Long-suffering sick to death, and violence roused
To range among the violent: dangerous dreams
Whereof your wisdom, though with temperate words,
Rebuking them, chastised me: whence, my lord,
I come to show you now what seed hath sprung
To what swift height and amplitude of doom
Far overshadowing Venice. You desired
A sign, as they that knew not Christ, and lo,
My lord, a sign I bring you. Twelve hours more
Shall see this moon of April half burnt out
And half the squares and highways of this town
A sea of blood full foaming toward the verge

Where it shall meet our natural sea, and bid
Her waters, widening over bank and bridge,
Swell strong with storm of murder's making. This
May none avert : God wills it : man desires
And shall by God's grace do it : but you, my lord,
Keep from those ways your foot at dawn, albeit
The cry be raised of enemies at our gates,
Of Genoa round our port in sail ; and keep
Your lifeblood from that torrent which shall drown
All palaces else that shall by dawn send forth
Their lords at summons sounded from St. Mark's :
And so, as now through me, God save you.

LIONI

Stay.

Thou didst not think to say so and pass forth
With no more question, scathless ?

BELTRAMO

Good my lord,

This did I think, that from your noble hand,
In quittance of my deep devotion shown
At risk and rate of honour and of life
To keep your head unscathed, I should not find
Disgrace for guerdon, or for thanksgiving
Death.

LIONI

Art thou all made up of words, and hast
No thought that runs not loose upon thy tongue
To tell thee such a warning given as thine
Can die not out within mine ear, and leave
Unwarned of peril, if peril indeed there be,
Venice ?

BELTRAMO

I would but do you service.

LIONI

Thanks.

A worthy service were it, my worthy friend,
Of me and thee, that thou shouldst bid me crawl
Aside from general ruin of all the state,
And I should grovel at thy beck, and creep
Darkling away from danger. What is this
That under a flickering veil of vehement words
Thou showest and wilt not show me?

BELTRAMO

Death, I say :

Death.

LIONI

If I knew thee not no coward or cur,
To-night I should misknow thee. Night and day
Is death not still about us, here and there,
Alive around the ways and hours of life,
That what we think or what we are fain to do
We should not do for death's sake? How these
knaves,
Whose life is service or rebellion, fear
Death ! and a child high-born would shame them.

BELTRAMO

If

Death seem so gracious in a great man's eye,
Die, my lord : I, too mean to live your friend,
Am not your murderer.

LIONI

Nay, nor any man's,
If I can stay thine hand betimes. I would not
By force withhold thee, nor by violence wring
What yet thou hast left unspoken forth : but hence
Thou goest not out, and I left ignorant here
What purpose haled thee hither.

BELTRAMO

Why, to you
Friendship ; and haply hate to no man else
Of all now damned alive to darkness.

LIONI

Good :
The slot is hot : I scent the quarry. So,
Some certain of thy kind are bound and sworn
To do the ignoble and the poor man right
By murderous justice done on us, who wrong
Our fellow-folk with flaunt of wicked wealth
And vex their baseness with nobility ?
And with our Doge's blood and ours ye would
Make ripe that harvest, fill that winepress full,
Which now not fifty years from this, ye know,
Dolcino thought to reap and tread, and bring
Equal and simple rule of right again
Among us called by Christ's name here on earth—
And how he died remembering, inch from inch
Rent living with red iron, and his bride
Burnt limb from limb before his eyes, thou wouldst
Eschew such end as theirs was ?

BELTRAMO

Twice, my lord,
You have erred : I stand not here to save myself ;
Nor stands our lord the Doge in danger yet,
If he that hears me speak love honour.

LIONI

Nay,
But if this be not wine that swells thy speech,
No less it is than murderous madness. How
May death stretch wing above all heads of ours
And shadow not our master's ? Him, of all
High-born in Venice, should conspiracy
First menace, risen from darkness such as broods
About such hearts as hate us. If thou be
Mad, be not yet thine own self-murderer : think—
For wine it is not that is wild in thee—
What peril even the least of all thy words,
If here thou pause, hath pulled upon thee.

BELTRAMO

That
Had I cast thought on, here I should not be—
Nor Lioni, nor the noblest born my lord,
Have power or breath to threaten or implore
Me, nor the least in Venice.

LIONI

Friend, from me
Nor threat nor prayer need any fear or hope
Who feeds on air and sunshine ; least of all
Thou : for of all men bred of baser kind,
Could I perchance fear any, thee at least

I could not, having called thee friend : for one
Who doubts or fears or dreams ingratitude,
Or holds for possible disloyalty,
Stands proven in sight of his own secret soul
As possibly, should chance or time prevail,
Disloyal and ungrateful. Such was I,
If man may say so, never : yet meseems
That unproved of cowardice I may crave
To know, hadst thou been haply less my friend,
How should mine hand have lost the power it hath,
My lips lacked breath to question thee ? or how
Should not the Doge, being our lord of lords,
Incarnate and impersonate Venice, bear
Part in our general danger ?

BELTRAMO

Nay, my lord,
I said not that ; part shall he bear therein,
God wot, and unendangered. Please you, sir,—
Please it your pride and pure nobility—
To spare your smile and shrug—give so much ease,
This hour, to lip and shoulder—I would say
What, being derided and endured—forborne,
Insulted, and forgiven,—it might not please
Your servant for your scornful sake to say.
You will not ask me, what ?

LIONI

Assuredly,
No.

BELTRAMO

Speak, then, and be cursed of God and man,
You bid me, who forbear to bid me.

LIONI

I

But bid thee now no longer hold me here
Awake and vexed with vehement speech wherein
If aught be honest nought is clear enough
To speak thee sound of wits : and didst thou so,
Of God and man forgiveness might I win
If I should bid God curse thee, and my men
Lead forth or thrust thee from my gates. Were this
For me—the word still twittering on thy tongue—
Death ?

BELTRAMO

Yea, my lord : and death for all your kin.

LIONI

By Christ, but this is fiery wine indeed
That speaks in thee so steadfast. Wouldst thou not
Sleep ?

BELTRAMO

Soon and sound enough will you, my lord,
Sleep, if my speech be slighted, that I speak
Out of true heart and thankfulness.

LIONI

And where,

When thus by night red riot runs and reels
And murder rides out revelling, where shall be
The keepers of our state ? where, first of all,
The Doge ?

BELTRAMO

They that keep our state so well
That only force can purge it—they shall be
Where sheep and oxen, fowl and fish are found,
When some great feast is toward and guests come in—
Dead on a heap : and he, their lord and ours—
Where think you, sir ?

LIONI

Nay, man, God knows, not I :
First be it or last of all the sacrifice,
Where the old man falls, there lies a brave man slain—
Head, hand, and heart of Venice.

BELTRAMO

He shall be
Where when a fight is won the general stands
Red-footed and red-handed and brow-bound
With bays that drip down blood.

LIONI

Your captain ?

BELTRAMO

Ay.

Believe me not, and perish.

LIONI

I am more like
To live, and see thee whipped or hanged, and not
Believe thee.

BELTRAMO

Choose : I have given you, sir, the chance
That none but one of all your kind is given :
Cast from your hand your luck and life, you die,
Self-slaughtered : on your head, not mine, the charge
Lies of your bloodshed.

LIONI

Man, if this be truth,
The sun may reel from heaven, and darkness rise
For dawn upon the world.

BELTRAMO

I cannot tell.
They say such things have been, sir.

LIONI

Nay, but none
Like this : Faliero captain of thy crew ?
Thine ?

BELTRAMO

Ay, my lord, we are despicable—and he
A man despised as we are, and most of all,
Being highest in place ; more grievous and more gross
Is thence his wrong, and keener thence the shame
That gnaws his heart away with fangs of fire.

LIONI

And he, to be revenged of us,—of them
Who spared a hound the halter, not the scourge—

Hath leagued himself, thou sayest, with knaves by night

To wash the ways with slaughter—set a knife
To the open throat of sleep—break trust, slay faith,
Strike through the heart of honour? stab the law,
Set for his mother a snare to strangle her,
Work miracles of murder? change a name
That now rings out a clarion in men's ears
For one that hisses like a snake, and means
Treason?

BELTRAMO

Sir, were it but for his behoof,
To feed his own lusts fat with gold and blood,
Gird his own brows with empire, steal, stab, lie,
And reign, abhorred and abject, over swine
That once were men, but changed their heart and head
To grovel, snout and groin, in slavery—then
Shame were it indeed, and shameful change, for him,
Being man, to shed man's innocent blood, break faith,
And spit at God, and triumph, and be damned
More deep than Cain with Judas, and his grave
For guerdon take the spittle and the spurns
Of all true men for ever: but the lord
Who leads us forth of bondage, though he lead
Through this red sea, struck no more loyal stroke
With heart more single or hand more honest once
Off Istria, nor at Zara.

LIONI

Once? ay, twice,
Our lord was found our saviour; now, if this

Be monstrous truth thou tell'st me, he, grown hoar
With glorious years and works, would leave his name
A traitor's, red and foul for ever. Nay,
But if this be no drunken dream or lie
No plea can cleanse him of the murderous taint
That reeks from names abominable of man
As manslaughterers of their brethren.

BELTRAMO

Sir, if Cain

Be smitten again of Abel ere he die,
Shall Abel stand attainted on this charge
As fratricide or traitor?

LIONI

Why, my friend,
I lack the lawyer's wit and tongue to prate
As advocate against thee : this is all
I can, to assure myself and heaven and thee
That this destruction thou wouldst bid me shun
Shall ere it fall on us be stayed. Reply
Not now, nor here : for hence thou goest not out
Till I to-night have communed with the lords
Nasoni and Cornaro, who shall make
Sharp inquisition of thy news and thee
Here, ere the council meet, and lay strict hand
On all found part of this conspiracy
Or like to dip red hands in danger, when
Strange darkness rides in the air, and strange design
Makes hot men's hearts with hope of evil. Thou
Shalt rest unhurt ; but we will know of thee
All needful for prevention.

BELTRAMO

Christ our Lord

Knows—

LIONI

That nor threat nor rack shall wring from thee
One word beyond thy will : so be it : I think
All we could win or wish of thee shall need
Nor force nor menace, promise, price, nor prayer,
To press forth easily as a grape gives wine.
Thou art tender-souled and honest, thankful, true,
A gentle knave and worthy : what is said
Unsay thou canst not, nor undo the deed
Done when thy footfall smote my threshold. So,
Be patient : this alone thou lackest : wait
And keep close lips till I come back.

BELTRAMO

My lord—

LIONI

My lord and thine is God, who led thee here
To save the world this ill, that day should be
And not this city—that the sun should rise
And see not Venice. How, by whom or whence,
Thou knewest of this—what part thou shouldst have
played
On this full stage of death, had no remorse
With timely pity toward me pricked thine heart—
I ask thee not : to them that I bring back,
Not me, shalt thou make answer. I would lay
No force upon thee more than needs : but here

Fast under guard abiding till they come
Safe shalt thou rest as Venice now through thee.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II. *The balcony of the ducal palace*

FALIERO and BERTUCCIO

FALIERO

Dawn—is it yet not dawn? Thine eyes, being young,
Are dazed with timeless waking; mine, that looked,
Ere thine saw birth, on battle, yet have strength
To outwatch the vigil of a boy's, and tell
Sunrise from set of stars or moonfall. See!
Light—is not light there?

BERTUCCIO

Sir, if time speak true,
It lacks an hour to sunrise: holier lights
Are these that hold procession through the square
With chants of penitence to churchward, timed
To match the death of darkness.

FALIERO

Didst thou think
God haply was not with us, that thy smile
Should mock their chant or me? Nay, thee he sends
This token in his witness: I desired
None: but if God be no unrighteous God,
And hold us fatherlike in keeping, here
Might man believe a comfortable sign
Sent as with sacred and superb acclaim

To match the death indeed of darkness, left
Too long upon the waters. Dawn shall be,
Thou sayest, an hour from hence : I know not : if,
By death of mine and thine and all we love,
Dawn verily in an hour might rise, and rest
As once on Rome, an agelong daylight—boy,
Wouldst thou, having thy fair long life to give,
Thy fair long life that should be, spare or shrink
Or grudge or groan to cast it from thine hand
As might a child a pebble, more than I
To give my thin-spun days and nights of life
Left, which I stake and smile at ?

BERTUCCIO

No, my lord :
If God know aught of man or man know aught,
God knows I know I would not.

FALIERO

Yea, and I
Know it : God love thee as I love, my boy,
For this we know of thee. And this do thou
Know likewise, and hold fast : that if to-day
Dawn rise not, but the darkness drift us down,
And leave our hopes as wrecks and waifs despised
Of men that walk by daylight, not with us
Shall faith decline from earth or justice end,
Or freedom, which if dead should bid them die,
Rot, though the works and very names of us,
And all the fruit we looked for, nipped of winds
And gnawn of worms, and all the stem that bore,
And all the root, wax rotten. Here shall be
Freedom, or never in this time-weary world

Justice ; nor ever shall the sunrise know
A sight to match the morning, nor the sea
Hear from the sound of living souls on earth,
Free as her foam, and righteous as her tides,
Just, equal, awless, perfect, even as she,
A word to match her music. If we fail,
We are even but we—I, thou, and these our friends
That rise or fall beside us : if we thrive,
Not I and thou and they triumph—not we
Prosper—but that which if we live or die
Alike and absolute, unhurt and whole,
Endures, being proven of our mortalities
Immortal—yea, being shown by sign of loss
And token of subdued infirmity,
And ruin, and all insistence of defeat,
And laughing lips and trampling heels of men
That smile and stamp above us buried, shown
Triumphant. Righteousness alone hath right
For love of all found loveliest, freedom, truth,
Faith, reason, hope, and honour, to require
Life at our hands : and if on sand or stone
Or if on fruitful ground the life we give
Fall, shed with all our heart and full free will,
This not concerns us, this, come storm or sun,
Regards us nowise : time hath all in hand :
And time, I think, shall hurl this world to hell,
Or give—not now, perchance, nor many a year,
Nor many a century hence—God knows—but yet
Some day, some year, some century, give our sons
Freedom. Nor haply then may we deserve
Remembrance : better many a man than we
May prove himself, and perish : yet, if God
Fail us not so, that, failing, we should die
Cowards, it may be we shall sleep not scorned

Of all that hold our faith for ever. Now
Go thou and watch, but not with me, who here
Would keep my watch alone till morning. God
Be with thee. (*Exit Bertuccio.*) God? may God
indeed to-night

Be with us? Yet red-handed men of death,
Scarce breathing now from battle, praise his name,
Give thanks for happy slaughters, mix with prayer
The panting passion of their hearts that beat
Like vultures' wings toward bloodshed: and shall we
Dare not desire of God his comfort, we
That war not save with wrongs abhorred of him,
That smite not heads of open enemies, men
Found manful in the fielded front of war,
Fair foes, and worth fair fighting, but of slaves
Who mar the name they mock with reverence, make
The fair fame foul of freedom, soil and stain
The seamless robe wherein their fathers clothed
For bridal of one bridegroom with the sea
Venice? When time hath wiped her tyrants out—
Time that now ripening thrusts into mine hand
The scythe to reap this harvest—earth has known
Never, since life sprang first against the sun,
So fair, so splendid, so sublime a life
As this that God shall give her: and to me,
To me and mine who served and saved her, life
Shall God give surely, such as dateless time
Spare, and its light puts out the shadow of death.

(*Voices chanting from below*)

Quis tam celer, quis tam fortis,

Pedem qui præcurrat mortis?

Quis e fractis tumbæ portis

Præter unum redeat?

*Præter unum Te reversus
Nemo, Christe, solem versus,
Mortis fluctu semel mersus,
Surget, sol dum cælo stat.*

FALIERO

Yea, but if many waters cannot quench
Love, nor the strong floods drown it, how shall not
Man's love for man, that saves and smites, to bring
For every slave deliverance, and for all
The peace of equal righteousness and right,
Though girt with even this iron girdle round
And robed in this red raiment, rise again
And as a swimmer against a sundering wave
Beat back the billow of death, and climb, and laugh
Loud laughter of thanksgiving? Strong is death,
But stronger lives man's love who dies for man
Than all ye fear and trust in, heaven or hell.

(Chanting again)

*De profundis tenebrarum
Ardor atrox animarum
Quas non legum vis tuarum,
Christe, fecit humiles,
Ex infernis in superna
Fervet: quem cùm lux æterna
Tangit, fit ut herba verna
Quam conculcat vulgi pes.*

FALIERO

O tender laws of bland humility
Wherewith priests' hearts are girdled! These are
they

Who drink and eat God, and who kiss and stroke
Satan ; who burn men's living limbs with fire
And hold themselves God's chosen and blest of God
And me of God rejected and accursed
Because in wrath long since I smote a priest
Who bore in hand God palpable, whereon
The curse of the eucharist I violated,
And of God's blessing made myself a curse,
Fell or shall one day fall and smite me. Nay,
If humbleness to these must buy men heaven,
Let all high hope stand outcast thence with me.

(*Chanting again*)

*Virgo sancta, Christe clemens,
Homo miser, homo demens,
Ubi Sathanas it semens,
Hunc secutus, nescit vos ;
Mortis messor, edax vitæ,
Spernit vos : at vos auditæ
Preces animæ contritæ
Flectant : nam quid sumus nos ?*

FALIERO

Not men, God knows, are ye nor any of you,
Priests, and the flocks of priesthood : sheep or swine
Or wolves at heart man finds you. Christ our Lord,
Chief light and lord of men, made manifest
Before no bloodier judgment-seat than yours
Man, and the son of man—no lord of priests,
No God of slaves who hears their tyrants pray,
And sees them, praying, smite earth and strengthen
hell,
And hallows hell with blessing—he, being just,

Should think, if he be God indeed, and hear
Me now and all men alway, if this word
Be bearable, that man, being smitten, should
Still turn his cheek and smite not. Nay, but, Lord,
Hadst thou been mere man, even as I, and borne
Shame, knowing thyself no God, whom no man's
hand

Could turn indeed to a thing dishonoured—nay,
But one whom shame might scourge and scar like
me,

Brand on thy brows and ravin round thine heart—
Thou, that couldst bear for us the body's death,
Thou couldst not, Christ, have borne it: hadst thou
borne,

Not higher of heart but less thou hadst been than we.

(*Chanting again*)

*Fac ut metat mali sator
Mali messem, mundi Stator,
Une, trine, tu Creator,
Pater, Fili, Spiritus :
Tuque, boni nobis bone
Dator, Marce, tu patrone,
Ab inferno nos latrone,
Salva nos ab hostibus.*

FALIERO

And I, for these a hellish thief in wait,
A midnight-mantled slayer—for these am I
Their headsman, I that was their head: but thou,
St. Mark, our lord, no better friend than I,
Not thou, not thou, to Venice. Have not these
Been sowers indeed of evil, and shall they reap

For harvest of a desolated field
Good? Have they not made wide the wilderness,
Kept fresh with blood the roots of tares and thorns,
Drawn dry the breasts of pale sterility,
Wasted the ways with fire and sown with salt,
That they should gather grain? Our foes are these,
Not Genoa, not the stranger, south nor east,
Turk nor Hungarian, but thy sons alone,
Venice, who mock their mother : thine it is,
Thine hand by mine that smites them, and redeems
Thine equal name for ever, lest the world
Lack this that none as thou shalt give hath given,
The light of equal manhood's equity,
Full freedom, sovereign where no sovereign sits.
But wilt not thou speak yet, Mark? From thy
tongue

Time is it now the word should break, that sounds
To them that do thee this dishonour death
And loftier life to Venice : yet not yet
Thy belfry through the sleep of tyrants flings
The knell that is a clarion, and mine ear
Takes only through the gleaming April gloom
That rustle of whispering water against the dawn
Which wakes before the world may. Wind is none
To warn our watery streets of storm, which here
Broods windward, hard on breaking ; if ye wist,
Friends !—Will the prayers of priests not wake thee,
then ?

(Chanting again)

*Te, cùm timor barbarorum
Corda conflictavit, horum
Turba prima te tuorum
Conclamabant Veneti :*

*Te, sub umbrâ Christi crucis,
Fontem te videmus lucis ;
Tanti stas tutamen ducis,
Tanti fautor populi.*

FALIERO

Ay, for no poor faint people shalt thou speak,
For no mean city : lion-like shall they,
With feet once loosened from the strangling toils,
Go forth to plant thy lion. But the duke,
The leader, red of hand and hoar of hair,
An old man clothed in slaughters—but the chief,
Worthy worship and honour once of all,
I, Marino Faliero, citizen,
Soldier, servant of Venice—how shall I
Follow, with feet washed here in civic blood,
The flag once more by civic hearts and hands
Exalted ? Nay, the fugitive feet that here
Found harbourage first, the feeble knees that fell,
Suppliant, and maimed with fear of foes behind,
Imploring first thy comfort, when the Hun
Raged as a fire against them—nay, the hands
That first here staked a camp in the eastward sea,
Trembling, and toward thine emblem and thy Lord's
Uplift with wail and worship—these that first
Scarce here gat rest and refuge where to die
Were worthier yet to found than I may be
To rear again from ruin Venice. O,
That thou wouldst pray God for me now to-night
To speed the wheels of morning ! Will this hour
Stretch not its darkness out to noon, and bid
The day lie dumb, lest when the morning speaks
Death answer with a cry from clamorous hell

And strike the sun down darkling, that the world
May reel in fearful travail out of life ?

(*Chanting again*)

*Mors immanis, mors immensa,
Tendit fila semper tensa ;
Illi regum sordet mensa,
Illi vana ducum vox :
Mors immensa, mors immanis,
Instat rebus mundi vanis ;
Fugit claris lux e fanis,
Mors cùm dixit, Fiat nox.*

FALIERO

Let there be night, and there was night—who says
That? Nay, though heaven and earth were they
that bade,
No less were light immortal, night no less
Fugitive, abject, void, vain, outcast, frail,
In the eye of dawn that seeks and sees not night.
Vain if my voice be, vainer yet are these
That swell from choral throats the choir of death
With prostrate noise of praises ; vain as fear,
Penitence, passion, ache of afterthought,
When man hath once laid hand on high design
And armed his heart with purpose. Death and life
In God's clear eyes are one thing, wrong and right
Are twain for ever : nor though night kiss day
Shall right kiss wrong and die not. Let the world
End ; if the spirit expire not, then in mine
The will that gave wing to this enterprise
Shall fade not, nor the trust I had alive
To serve not wrath but righteousness at last

With offering shed of sin for sacrifice.
Was I not chosen as helmsman of my state,
As herdsman of my people? Woe were mine
If when the dogs turn wolves to rend the sheep
I durst not drown or hang them, with their jaws
Yet foul and full of flesh and wet red fleece,
Or when the ship reels right and left on death,
Storm-stunned, and loud with mutiny as with fear,
Would ease her not of mutinous rioters, fain
To bind me foot and hand, and bid the wheel
Swing as the storm wills till the tumbling prow
Plunge, and dive, and the wreck bear down the crew
And them, still drunk with rage of revel, whence
No sunken state rose ever. Let them live
And all this people perish? God, not I.

(*Chanting again*)

*Miserere, Pastor vere,
Pastor clemens, miserere,
Sere iudex, ultor sere,
Deus magne, Deus mi:
Quanquam plena vanitatis,
Fracta vi, laborat ratis,
Miserere civitatis,
Miserere domini.*

FALIERO

Yea, pity and mercy need we both—of man
They that of man shall find not, and of God
I, that may haply find it. Vanity
Too vain indeed for men most frail of soul
Were this, that one of fourscore years should dream
To twine himself with trembling treasonous hands

False wreaths of timeless triumph, steal the crown
By freedom woven about his country's head
To change its green leaf into gold, and wear
A diadem's weight brow-bound of empire, till,
Some three days thence, death, laughing broad and
blind,

Laid hand upon his bloodred hand, and led
To hell the hoar head and the murderous heart,
For three days' kingdom's sake perpetually
Damned, and dishonoured. Never man that sinned,
Traitor nor tyrant, thief nor manslayer, none,
Did thus, nor would, being less than mad with sin—
Not Nero, nor Iscariot. I nor mine
By this may thrive more than the meanest born
That plies his oar in Venice. One for all
Strikes, that for each man all his brethren may
Think, speak, and strike hereafter. Shall not this
Be? for the woful warning song of wail
Hath ended, and the new song only heard
Is now the sun's at sundawn. Now, St. Mark,
Speak! for thine hour, even thine, it is that strikes,
First hour of this first day that sees thy sons
Free, father, as thy soul is free in heaven,
With no man's shadow cast on them but thine.
Why should the sun keep silence here? thou seest,
Night seals not up for us the lips of light
As on the downward verge of hell: and thou,
Why should thy tongue be sealed, and all our hope
Perish, as might some heartless bondman's, worn
With wasting sloth and patience? Night and hell,
With all their mortal ministers in man,
Shame, doubt, and base endurance, force and fear,
Cold heart, and abject custom, these are they
That fight against us: fain, with all this aid,

Fain would night thrust us back and bind us fast
Where no man hears the sun's word : nor may these
By harmless hands be fought with, nor subdued
With bloodless or with blameless weapons : yet,
If hell be here not yet, ere man make earth
Hell, here to-day the sun should speak, and thou
Make answer, Mark, and help us. Yea, for here
Night hath not put the sun to silence : dawn
Speaks : and we lack but one loud word from thee.

Enter an Officer with Guards

OFFICER

My lord, you are prisoner of the state, and mine.

FALIERO

Thine ! Does my nephew live ?

OFFICER

He lives as you—

Prisoner.

FALIERO

I think I am overwatched, and thou
Part of the dream I walk in unaware—
A thing made out of slumber. Many a night
I have slept but ill—never so sound as this.
Why tolls the bell not from St. Mark's ?

OFFICER

My lord,

By mandate of the sovereign council met

The warden of the bell-tower had in charge
To see that none should sound the bells to-day.
The gates are fastened of the palace square :
The Ten, with twenty chosen in aid of them
Forth of the chiefest of the state, are set
To judge the prisoners even this hour attain
On mortal charge of murderous treason.

FALIERO

If

True men be they that shall arraign me, I
May stand in sooth approved their traitor.

OFFICER

Sir,

For your sole name's sake is it of all the rest
That this new court of judgment sits, to speak
On this great cause no common sentence.

FALIERO

No :

Strange court, and stranger trial, and most of all
Strange will the strange court's judgment held to-day
Read where it stands on record. Good my friend,
I will not trouble thee nor vex thy lords
With tarriance nor with wrangling : I desire
Nothing of man, nor aught of God save peace.
I shall not lack it long : yet would I say
Perchance a word before I die, because
I have loved this city. Lead me where they sit
That I may stand and speak my soul and go :
The rest is death's and God's : if these be just,
Judge they between us, and their will be mine.

[*Exeunt.*

ACT V

SCENE I. *The Hall of the Council of Ten*

BENINTENDE *and Senators sitting. Enter FALIERO, guarded*

BENINTENDE

Justice has given her doom against the accused,
Israello and Calendaro : they that fled
To Chioggia lie in ward, and hence await
An equal sentence : this remains, to speak
Judgment on him, the guiltiest head of all
And murderous heart of this conspiracy,
Head once and heart of Venice, present here
To bear the award of retributive law
Laid on her traitor and your enemy. Sirs,
Is it your will to hear him answer ?

SENATORS

Yea.

BENINTENDE

Marin Faliero, leave is thine to speak.

FALIERO

And leave is yours to slay me : yet for both,
Lords councillors, I thank you : most for death,
And somewhat yet for freedom given my speech
Ye know that being your prince and thrall elect
I have lived not free, who now shall freely die ;
By doom indeed of yours, but mine own will
Rejoicingly confirms it. Fourscore years
Have given mine eyesight and my spirit of life
The sun and sea to feed on, and mine heart
This people and this city chosen of God
To love and serve, and this forlorn right hand
Some threescore of those years have given the gift
With furtherance of God's comfort and my sword's
To smite your foes and scatter, till to-day
I am here arraigned as deadliest of them all.
Nor verily ever stood ye, nor shall stand,
In risk so dire, and die not : yea, when death
Hangs hard above your heads as over mine
Here, and the straitened spirit abhors the flesh,
Then hardly shall their mutual severance be
Nearer : for chance or God has brought you forth
From under veriest imminence of death
And shadowing darkness of his hand uplift
And wing made wide above you. No man's head
Should God have spared, had God been one with me,
Or chance and I like-minded : that ye live,
Praise God, and not my purpose : never man
Bore mind more bent on one thing most desired,
No sinner's more on sin, no saint's on God,
Than mine with all its might and weight of will
On trust of your destruction. Hope on earth
Save this, desire of gift save this from heaven,

Had I, since first this fire was lit in me,
None : and now knowing it vain I would not live
One hour beyond your sentence. Whence or how
God kindled it against you, for of God,
I say, of God it came, ye marvel, seeing
No cause as great as my great rage of will
To rouse in me such ravin : yet, my lords,
If thirst or ever hunger gnawed man's heart,
Mine did they till your death should satiate it,
Your general death and single : yea, had God
Held in one hand forth toward me death for you,
For me perpetual penance, and in one
For you long life and paradise for me,
I had chosen, and given him thanks who gave me
choice,

Revenge with hell, not heaven with pardon. Yet
Not my wrong only, not my wrath alone,
Were all that made my spirit a sword and kept
My thought a fire against you : though the wrong
Were monstrous past memorial made of man,
Past memory kept of time alive to mark
Ingratitude most memorable, and the wrath,
How sharp soe'er, not more than proves in God
By fire and fierce apocalypse of doom
Justice : for shame that smites an old man's cheek
Is as a whetted sword that cleaves his heart,
His hand, strong once, being weaponless : and mine
The shame that spat on was as fire to burn,
And mine the sword that clove was fire, and mine
The weapon that forsook had made it once
Famous. But yet I curse not God for you
That ye denied me, being the men ye were,
Redress : for had ye granted, haply then
I had died content, and never cast by chance

A thought away at hazard on the wrongs
That all men bear who bear your lordship. Now
By light and fire of mine own shame and wrong
I have seen the shames, I have read the wrongs of
these

Who, free being born, and free men called by name,
Endure with me your mastery. This ye call
An equal weal, a general good, a thing
Divine and common, mutual and august,
Hailed by the holiest name that hallows right,
One chosen of many kingdoms, kingless—one
Not ranged among but reared above them, one
Found worth a word that whoso hears takes heart
And triumphs in his motherland, of men
Not named as theirs whose heads bow down to man,
Nor kingdom called nor empire, but acclaimed
Republic—this that all men praise as ye,
Ye only, ye dishonour. Nought is this,
To call no man of all that tread on men
King, if men call a man that walks on earth
Master, and bind about a new-born brow
Inheritance of lordship. Hand from hand
Takes, and resigns in vain, the wrongful right,
By reasonless transmission : man by man,
The imperious races, lessening toward their last,
Perish : yet power with even their last is born,
Because his mother bare him. Sirs, this law
Would wake on lips that wist not what were smiles
Laughter : but if the unreason brought not forth
Shame, haply men, the fools of patience, might
Endure it, and eschew, by luck's good leave,
Scorn : which they shall not surely who forbear
And bear what honour may not. Sirs, take note
That with men's wrongs and sufferings age on age

This blindworm custom have ye fed and made
A serpent fanged and flying, with eyes and wings,
To ravin on men's hearts. Pride, shame, sloth, lust,
Are dragons' teeth : right royally ye err
To deem that these will sting not, or that men,
No bondslaves born but citizens as ye,
Being stung, will smile and thank you. Now
perchance

Would one make answer, saying I too was born
Not least of all nor less than any of you
Noble, but heir of place as proud as yours,
Of name as high in history, by my sires
None otherwise than yours from yours bequeathed
With attributes and accidents to boot
Of chance hereditary : which truth being truth,
Fierce madness is it in me for sheer despite
To league myself against my kind, and give
My brethren's throats up to the popular knife
And rage of hands plebeian, all for this,
This recompense of all, to stand myself
Amid the clamorous rout of thralls released
Dumb, disarrayed, disseated, dispossessed,
Degraded and disfigured of the grace
My birth had cast about me : but, my lords,
Not all men alway, though ye know not this,
Yearn toward their own ends only, live and die
Desiring only for themselves and theirs
Honour, with sure-eyed justice ; righteousness
That holds the rights up of a noble's house,
Walks firm and straight on service in his hall,
But halts beyond his threshold ; equity
Which is not equal, justice less than just,
And freedom based on bondage : else indeed,
Were all souls nobly born so base by birth,

No tongue most violent or most furious hand
Uplift or loud against nobility
Spake ever yet nor struck unjustly. Men
May bear the blazon wrought of centuries, hold
Their armouries higher than arms imperial, yet
Know that the least their countryman, whose hand
Hath done his country service, lives their peer
And peer of all their fathers. Ye, that know
Nor this nor aught that men call manful—ye
That feed upon your fathers' fame as worms
Fed on their flesh, and leave it rotten—ye
That prate and plume and prank yourselves in pride
Because your grandsires, men that were, begat
Sons yet not all unmanned, and these again,
Begot on wombs less loyal than of yore
You—how should ye know this? But I, fair lords,
Born even as you, was nurtured even as they
Whom your fair lordships hold, being humbler born,
Foul : hand in hand with these I fought your fights,
I bore your banner : nor was mine in strife
Reared higher than hands which there kept rank with
mine,

And were not noble : whence, from touch of these
And fellowship in fighting, I, whom ye
Call peer of yours, found poor men peers of mine
And you by proof of act and test of truth
Vassals. But some perchance of yours, ye say,
Fought far and fain of fight as we, and bore
As high the lion : sirs, we know it : but this
We know not, that ye bore it higher, or stood
More steadfast in the shock of charging death,
Than poor men born your followers : and on these,
On sons of these ye have laid such laws, and made
Life so by manlike men unbearable,

That by what end soever he that ends
This reign of chance, this heritage of reign,
Must live or die approved of all save you,
Of justice justified, of earth and heaven
In life or death applauded. Nought would I
Nor aught would any say to shame you more :
And now, as ye must live, it seems, let me
Die : God be with you, and content with me.

BENINTENDE

Lords councillors, declare your sentence.

ALL

Death.

BENINTENDE

Then, Marino Faliero, Doge, thus
By me this court speaks judgment on thee, now
Convicted by confession. As to-day
Thy chief twain fellow-traitors, gagged and gyved,
From the red pillars of the balcony
Swing stark before the sunset, so shalt thou
At noon to-morrow suffer privily
Decapitation ; and thy place of death
The landing-place that crowns the Giants' Stairs
Where first thine oath was taken. For thy corpse,
We grant it burial with thy sires by night
In Zanipolo : but thy portrait's place
Among our painted princes in the hall
Of our great council void and bare shall stand
In sign of shame for ever, veiled in black,
Where men shall read, writ broad below, *This place
Is Marino Faliero's, for his crimes
Beheaded.*

FALIERO

Ay? that all men seeing may crave
To know what crime of crimes was his, and hear
The word in answer given that crowns the deed
Wherewith confronted all fair virtues, all
Good works of all good men remembered, seem
Pale as the moon by morning—even the word
That was to Greece as godhead, and to Rome
The sign and seal of sovereign manfulness—
Tyrannicide: thanks be with tyranny
That so by me records it. I shall sleep
To-night, I think, the gladlier that I know
Where I shall lay my head to-morrow. Sirs,
Farewell, and peace be with you if it may.
I have lost, ye have won this hazard: yet perchance
My loss may shine yet goodlier than your gain
When time and God give judgment. If there be
Truth, true is this, that I desired the right
And ye with hands as red sustain the wrong
As mine had been in triumph. Have your will:
And God send each no bitterer end than mine.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II. *An apartment in the ducal palace*

Enter FALIERO, the DUCHESS, and BERTUCCIO

FALIERO

Nay, children, be not over childlike, ye
That see what men who love not truth will call
The natural doom ensuing which marks as mad

And damns to death inevitable as just
An old man's furious childishness : be you
Wiser : let me not need bid you be wise,
Who am found of all men foolishest, and yet
Were this last chance before me laid again
Would do not other than I did. Take heart :
What mean ye so to mourn upon me ?

BERTUCCIO

Sir,

Am I not found unworthy ?

FALIERO

No, my boy :
They do not ill, being lords of ours, to slay
Me ; nay, they could not spare : but thee to slay,
To spill thy strong young life for truth to me,
In all men's eyes would mark them monstrous : thou
Must live, and serve my slayers, and serving them
Sustain my memory by the proof—if God
Shall give thee grace to prove it—that thy name,
Thy father's name and mine, in true men's ears
Rings truth, and means not treason. Though they be
Ill rulers of this household, be not thou
Too swift to strike ere time be ripe to strike,
Nor then by darkling stroke, against them : I
Have erred, who thought by wrong to vanquish wrong,
To smite by violence violence, and by night
Put out the power of darkness : time shall bring
A better way than mine, if God's will be—
As how should God's will be not ?—to redeem
Venice. I was not worthy—nor may man

Till one as Christ shall come again, be found
Worthy to think, speak, strike, foresee, foretell,
The thought, the word, the stroke, the dawn, the day,
That verily and indeed shall bid the dead
Live, and this old dear land of all men's love
Arise and shine for ever : but if Christ
Came, haply such an one may come, and do
With hands and heart as pure as his a work
That priests themselves may mar not. God forbid
That : if not they, then death shall touch it not,
Nor time lay hand thereon, nor wrath to come
Of God or man prevail against it, though
Men's tongues be mad against him till he die.

(Voices chanting from below)

*Quis es tantus, quis es talis,
Cui non ira triumphalis,
Ira fulvis ardens alis,
Metu mentem comprimit ?
Ira Dei, nobis dira,
Manet immortalis ira,
Sensu sæva, visu mira,
Mitis quæ non fletu fit.*

FALIERO

Again my psalmists answer me ? who bade
These voices hither outside the sanctuary
To sound below there now ? Nay, this can be
But chance of sacred service, or goodwill
To usward in our darkening hour, or scorn
Wherewith being moved we should but stand abased
Too low for base men's mockery. What, my child,
Does their fierce music hurt thee ?

DUCHESS

Nay, not more,
My lord, than all things heard or seen that say
I shall not see nor hear much longer you
Whom, though I loved you ever, now meseems
I have never loved as now ; God knows how well,
None knows but I how bitterly : but this
I should not say, to vex your kind last thoughts
With more than even your natural care of me.

FALIERO

Sweet, wouldst thou think to vex me? nay, then,
weep :
Else canst thou not. This very wrath of God
Wherewith the threats of priestly throats would shake
Mountains, and scourge the sea to madness, what
Can this do, being by tears intractable,
Implacable to moan of men, if men,
Being threatened, moan or weep not? Fear and
shame,
The right and left hand of a base man's faith,
Can lay not hold on hearts found higher : and how,
Were God no higher of heart than men most base,
But wayward, fierce, unrighteous, merciless,
As these who praise proclaim him, how should he
Have power on any save a base man's heart ?
His wings of wrath were narrower than the soul's
That soar and seek toward justice, though the wind
Break them, and lightning burn the blind bright eyes
That even for love would look on God and live,
But find for light fire, and for comfort fear.

(*Chanting again*)

*Nigris involutum pennis
Te circumdat nox perennis ;
Non quinquennis, non decennis
Implicabit umbra te ;
Sed antiqua, sed æterna,
Dum sit lux in cœlo verna,
Nox profunda, nox hiberna,
Christus unde salvet me.*

FALIERO

And Christ keep all who love him clean of you
Who turn their love to loathing. Why, these priests
Would make the sunshine hellfire, thence to light
The piles whereon they burn with live men's limbs
The heart and hope of manhood. Light save this
They know not, nor desire it : light and night
To them are other than to men that see
Light laugh in heaven and hurt not, night come down
To comfort men from heaven : sweet spring to them
Is winter, and their souls of the iron ice
That Alighieri found at hell's hard heart
Take winter's core for springtide. Woe were thine,
Venice, and woe were Italy's, if these
Held ever in their hand all hearts of men
Born fain to serve their country : priests would turn
With prayers and promises and blessings half
The blood therein to death-cold poison.

BERTUCCIO

Sir,

Did not the imperial Gregory glorify
Rome, when his heel set on the German's neck

Trampled her sovereign foeman as a snake
Starved in the snows ? and might not such a priest
Bless freedom, and the blessing of his breath
Not blast but bid it blossom ?

FALIERO

Son, by Christ,
I doubt a curse were found less like to hurt
And frost less like to wither.

DUCHESS

Dear my lord,
Have patience, and take heed of words ; they fall
Not echoless on silence ; these of yours
Affright me ; nay, be patient, and give ear,
And pardon me that pray you hearken.

FALIERO

Ay—
To what word next shall fill our ears with prayer
That fain would sound like thunder ? Let them pray.

(*Chanting again*)

*Nos, ut servi facti servis,
Fracti corde, fracti nervis,
Congregamur in catervis,
Vagabundi, tremuli ;
Sed, ô fautor tu sincere,
Judex mitis ac severe,
Miserere, miserere,
Miserere populi !*

FALIERO

Yea, for they need and find not mercy, they
Whose count makes up the people. God, if God
Be pitiful, on these have pity : man
Hath more for beasts he slays in sport, for hounds
That help him, than for women, children, men,
He treads to death and passes ; would that I,
Though ruin had earlier fallen on me, and left
Less than I leave of record now, betimes
Had taken thought to comfort these, or make
At least their life more even with equity,
Their days more clear of cloud, their sleep more sure,
Their waking sweeter. Lord and chief was I,
And left them miserable ; not vile indeed
As those whom kings may spit on, but abased
Below the royal right of manhood.

DUCHESS

Nay—

Have you not always shown them kindness more
Than poor men crave of noble ?

FALIERO

Child, the right
That man of man craves, and requires not, being
Too weak to claim and conquer, what is this
But sign and symbol of so vile a wrong,
So foul a fraud, so fierce a violence, borne
So long and found so shameful, that the prayer
Sounds insolence ? I do not pray thee—*Sweet,*
Play me not false ; thou dost not pray me spare
To smite, revile, misuse thee : man of man

Desiring mercy, justice, leave to live,
Were all as base a suppliant. No, not me
But one more pure of passion, one more strong,
Being gentler and more just, if God be good
And time approve him righteous, God shall give
The grace I merited not, to do men right
And bring men comfort : wrath and fear and hope,
Save such as angels watching earth from heaven,
And filled with fiery pity pure as God's,
Feel, and are kindled into love, to him
Shall rest unknown for ever : men that hear
His name far off shall yearn at heart, and thank
God that they hear, and live : but they that see,
They that touch hands with heaven and him, that feed
With light from his their eyes, and fill their ears
With godlike speech of lips whereon the smile
Is promise of more perfect manhood, born
Of happier days than his that knew not him,
And equal-hearted with the sun in heaven
From rising even to setting, they shall know
By type and present likeness of a man
What, if truth be, truth is, and what, if God,
God : for by love that casts itself away
And is not moved with passion, but more strong
For sacrifice deliberate and serene
Than passion sevenfold heated for revenge,
Shall all not beastlike born, not serpent-souled,
Not abject from the womb, discern the man
Supreme of spirit, and perfect, and unlike
Me : for the tongue that bids dark death arise,
The hand that takes dead freedom by the hand
And lifts up living, other these must be
Than mine, and other than the world, I think,
Shall bear till men wax worthier.

BERTUCCIO

Such a man
Shall come not even till God come back on earth.

FALIERO

Who knows if God shall come not? or if God
Be other—yea, be anything, my son,
If not the spirit incarnate and renewed
In each man born most godlike, and beheld
Most manful and most merciful of all?

(*Chanting again*)

*Parce, Deus, urbi parce ;
Tuque summâ constans arce
Sis adjutor urbi, Marce :
Cor peccatis conditum
Nescit quanta, nescit qualis,
Lex æterna, lex æqualis :
Mors per Christum fit mortalis,
Vita fit per Spiritum.*

FALIERO

Ay, with the breath of God between her lips
From Christlike lips breathed through them, she
that lay
Dead in the dark may stand alive again,
And strike death dead : yea, death may turn to life
By grace of that live spirit invulnerable
We call the breath or ghost of God most high,
The very God that comes to comfort men,
That falls and flies abroad in tongues of fire

From soul to soul enkindled. Mark nor Christ
Wrought miracle ever more than this divine
Nor so by slaves and fools incredible
As this should be, to raise not one man up,
Not one man four days dead, as Lazarus once,
But all a people many a century dead,
And damned, men deemed, to death eternal. This
The heart of man, buried as dead in sins,
May feel not nor conceive, and having felt
Continue in corruption : this alone
Shall stand a sign on earth from heaven, whose light
Makes manifest the righteousness of God
In mortal godhead proven immortal, shown
Firm by full test of mere infirmity
And very God by manhood. Otherwhere
Might no man hold this possible, but here
May no man hold this doubtful. Are we not
Italians, made of our diviner earth
And fostered of her far more sovereign sun,
That we should doubt, and not be counted mad,
What no man born to less inheritance
And reared on records less august than ours
Would not be mad to dream that he believed
And would not sin to seek it? Have not we
Borne men to witness for the world, and made
Grey time our servant and our secretary
To register what none may read and say
That ours is not the lordship, ours the law,
And ours the love that lightens and that leads
High manhood by the heart as mothers lead
Children, and history leads us by the hand
From glory forth to glory through the gloom
That bids not hope die, nor bring forth despair,
Though faith alone keep heart to comfort us?

What though five hundred years pass—what, were these

A thousand, if the sepulchres at last
Be rent, and let forth Venice—and let rise
Rome? Yea, my city, what though time and shame,
Though change and chance defile thee? Servitude
Shall fall from off thee as the shadow of night
Falls from the front of morning: thou shalt see
By life re-risen above the tombs revived
Death stricken dead, and time transfigured. We
Fight, fall, and sleep, and shadows shown in song
And phantoms painted of us overlive
Our substance and our memory: men that hear
A name that was a clarion once will cry,
What means it? eyes that see on storied walls
Our likeness carved or coloured may perchance
Wax wide with wonder why to dead men's eyes
Our fame seemed worth memorial: but to none
Shall not our country seem divine, and heaven
The likeness of our country. Die we may
From record of remembrance: but, being sons
Whose death or life, whose presence or whose dust,
Whose flesh or spirit is part of Italy,
What mean these fools to threaten us with death?

DUCHESS

My lord, your heart is nobly bent on earth,
But earthward ever: soon by doom of man
Must your strong spirit of life and pride pass forth
And dwell where all of earth it loved is found
Nothing; for you—if love may speak, that speaks
For faith's and fear's sake now presumptuously—
Meseems for you this hour should keep in sight

Not Italy, but paradise : alas,
I cannot tell what I should say to please
God, and to do you service : yet I would
Say somewhat, might it serve.

FALIERO

Thou sayest enough
With so sweet eyes. Content thee : death is not
Fearful, nor aught in death or life but fear.

(*Chanting again*)

*Pestis quâ dolore cincta
Gemit vita fletu tincta,
Suis ipsa vinclis vincta,
Cadit reatrix rerum fors :
Portentosa, maledicta,
Suo dente serpens icta,
Jacet mundi victrix victa,
Jacet mortem passa mors.*

FALIERO

Lo now, the folk who live and thrive by death,
Who feed on all men's fear of it, deride
The fear they foster : be not priestlier thou
Than very priests are. Child, if God be just,
Let God do justice : if he be not, then
Man's righteousness rebukes him : and the man
That loves not more himself than other men
Is held not all unrighteous. Death, I think,
Of all my sins shall shrive me : say this were
Sin, which had yet shed less of innocent blood
Than any blameless battle spills, and earns

For all who fought men's praises, yet I give
My life for lives I took not, and I give
Less grudgingly than gladly. Not for me
Need any—nay, not ye—weep, as myself,
Were tears to me less hard and strange, might weep
For some that die with me and some that live.
I am sorry for my seamen : Calendaro
Was no faint heart in fight, but swift of hand
As fire that strikes : if one that bears his name
Crave ever help at need or grace of thee,
Forget not me nor him, but what thou canst,
If any grace be left thee, son, to show,
Do gladly for my sake : he served me well :
And now the wind swings and the ravens rend
What was a soldier. Not to mine or me
Has this the fairest palace built with hands
Been fortunate or favourable : the day
Last year that led me hither led me not
With prosperous presage toward the natural shore
That should have given me welcome.

DUCHESS

No, my lord.

The sign was fearful to us.

FALIERO

Ay—there to alight
Where men that die by law, thou knowest, are slain
Was no such token as uplifts men's hearts
And swells their hopes with promise. Dost thou
mind
How deadly lowered that noon whose haze beguiled
Our blindfold bark of state to the evil goal

Whereon my life now shatters? Thou didst think
A sign it was from Godward. Let it be.
No sign can help or hurt us that foreshows
What must be : God might spare his dim display
Of half portended purpose, and appear
No less august, less wise or terrible,
Than threats that scare or scare not hearts like
ours
With doom incognizable of doubtful death
Proclaim him and proclaim not. Now from mine
The shadow of doubt has passed away, and left
The shadow of death behind it, which to me
Seems less uncomfortable and dark : for this
I ever held worse than all certitude,
To know not what the worst ahead might be
As now, being near the rocks, I see it, and die.

(*Chanting again*)

*Contemplamini, quot estis,
Ex infernâ quàm cœlestis
Illa nobis olim pestis
Salus exit hominum :
Mors in vitam transformata
Mutat mundos, mutat fata,
Fulget per stellarum præta
Lumen ipsa luminum.*

FALIERO

If by man's hope or very grace of God
Dark death be so transfigured, I, that yet
Know not, desire not knowledge, being content
To prove the transformation : thou, if this

Please thee, believe and hold for actual truth
That which gives heart at least to heartless fear
And fire to faith and power to confidence
More strong than steel to strike with. Sure it is
That only dread of death is veriest death
And fear of hell blows hellfire seven times hot
For souls whose thought foretastes it : and for all
That fear not fate or aught inevitable,
Seeing nought wherein change breeds not may be
changed

By force of fear or vehemence even of hope,
Intolerable is there nothing. Seven years since
Mine old good friend Petrarca should have died,
He thought, for utter heartbreak, and he lives,
And fills men's ears and souls with sweeter song
Than sprang of sweeter seasons : yet is grief
Surely less bearable than death, which comes
As sure as sleep on all. We deem that man
Of men most miserably tormented, who,
Being fain to sleep, can sleep not : tyrants find
No torture in their torturous armoury
So merciless in masterdom as this,
To hold men's lids aye waking : and on mine
What now shall fall but slumber ? Yet once more,
If God or man would grant me this, which yet,
Perchance, is but a boy's wish, fain I would
Set sail, and die at sea ; for half an hour,
If so much length of life be left me, breathe
The wind that breathes the wave's breath, and
rejoice
Less even in blithe remembrance of the blast
That blew my sail to battle, and that sang
Triumph when conquest lit me home like fire—
Yea, less in very victory, could it shine

Again about me—less than in the pride,
The freedom, and the sovereign sense of joy,
Given of the sea's pure presence. Mine she was
By threescore years and ten of strenuous love
Or ever man's will wedded us : and hers
Am I now dying not so divine a death
As Istria might have given me, had the stars
Shone less oblique that marred and made my doom
Most adverse in prosperity. That day
Rang trumpet-like in presage and in praise
Of proud work done and prouder yet to do
By hands and hearts Venetian : then to die
With so great sound and splendour on the sea
Shed broad from battle rolling round us—there
To put life off triumphantly, like one
That lies down lordlier than he rose, and wears
Rest like a robe of triumph, woven more bright
Than gold that clothed him waking—this had been
High fortune for the highest of happier men
Than fate had made Faliero. But for him
Reserved was this, to reap for harvest thence
Praise, acclamation, thanksgiving, and sway,
Which all were worth not any mean man's wage
Who serves and is not scoffed at : and from these,
Reaped once, to grind the bitter bread of shame,
And taste it salt as tears are. This white head,
Which swords had spared that should not, being set
high,
Hath borne a buffet for a crown, and felt
The strokes of base men bruise it : eyes and tongues
More vile than earth have mocked at me, and live,
And hiss and glare me to my grave, cast out
From high funereal fellowship of fame
And daylight honour shown the dead that pass

Unshamed among their fathers. Let it be.
Albeit no place among them all were mine,
Time haply might bring back my dust, and chance
Mix all our tombs together : but such hope
Should move not much the lightest soul alive
That death draws near to enfranchise, and to bring
Far out of reach of death and chance and time.

(*Chanting again*)

*Spes incertas facit certas,
Mentes implet inexpertas,
Lux in animo libertas,
Fides in superna dux :
Ut æternam per æstatem,
Per supernam civitatem,
Fiat lux per libertatem,
Sit libertas ipsa lux.*

FALIERO

Yea? then, God send it be so : for he knows,
Though priests and lay-folk, lords and vassals born,
Know not, that God's omnipotence can make
No light whose fire outshines a marshlight shine
On eyes that see not freedom. Faith, whose trust
Forsakes for thirst of heaven our natural earth,
And hope that hovers out of sight, and love
Whose eyes being set against the sun are blind
And see not men that suffer, nor look back
To lift and light them up with comfort given
From brethren's hearts to brethren, these can heal
Of all the mortal plaguesores of the world
None, and for all their wild weak will can give

Nothing ; they wail and cry, they rage and rend,
Shed blood with prayer for sacrifice, and make
Day foul with fume of fires unnatural, whence
Hell risen on earth reeks heavenward : nor may man
From faith that hangs on lips whose doom feeds hell,
From hope through fear kept living, or from love
Whose breath burns up the life of pity, dream
To gather fruit, and die not. Liberty
Is no mere flower that feeds on light and air
And sweetens life and soothes it, but herself
Air, light, and life, which being withdrawn or
quenched

Or choked with rank infection till it rot
Gives only place to death and darkness. I
Would fain have hewn a way for her to pass
As fire that cleaves a forest : and the flame
Takes hold on me that kindled it. My child,
Weep not for that ; weep, if thou wilt, that man,
So kind and brave as good men are, so true,
So loving, yet should be so slow to love
More than the life of days and nights, fulfilled
With love and hate that flower and bear not fruit,
Pain, pleasure, fear, and hope more vain than these,
Freedom. Thou wast not wont to weep : thine eyes
Were flower-soft emeralds ever : now they turn
To cloudier change than flaws the sapphire found
Not worth a bright brow's wearing. What is here
Allowed of God or wrought of men, that thou
Shouldst weep to see it ? I have sinned, and die : if
sin

It be to strike too swift and wide a stroke
At men undoomed of justice, though by truth
Long since, and witness borne of wrongdoing here,
Doomed ; and if death it be for one content,

For one most tired with sight and sense of ill,
To pass, and know no more of it, but sleep
Where sleep takes heed of nothing. Ye that wake,
Forget not nor remember overmuch
Or me that loved you and was loved, or aught
Of time's past coil or comfort : what ye will
Of what gives comfort yet, if aught there be,
Keep still in heart, and nought that gives not : life
Hath borne for me not bitter fruit alone,
But sweet as love's own honey : nor for you,
What several ways ye walk soever, till
Night fall about them, shall not life bring forth
Comfort. And now, before the loud noon strike
Whose stroke for me sounds midnight, ere I die,
Kiss me. Live thou, and love my Venice, boy,
Not more than I, but wiselier : serve her not
For thanksgiving of men, nor fear nor heed,
Nor let it gnaw thine heart to win for wage,
Ingratitude : let them take heed and fear
Who pay thee with unthankfulness, but thou,
Seeing not for these thou fightest, but for them
That have been and that shall be, sons and sires,
Dead and unborn, men truer of heart than these,
Be constant, and be satisfied to serve,
And crave no more of any. Fare thee well.
And thou, my wife and child, all loves in one,
Sweet life, sweet heart, fare ever well, and be
Blest of God's holier hand with happier love
Than here bids blessing on thee. Hark, the guard
Draws hither : noon is full : and where I go
Ye may not follow. Be not faint of heart :
I go not as a base man goes to death,
But great of hope : God cannot will that here
Some day shall spring not freedom : nor perchance

May we, long dead, not know it, who died of love
For dreams that were and truths that were not.

Come :

Bring me but toward the landing whence my soul
Sets sail, and bid God speed her forth to sea.

[Exeunt.]

ROSAMUND
QUEEN OF THE LOMBARDS
A TRAGEDY

TO
MRS. DISNEY LEITH

THIS PLAY IS INSCRIBED

BY HER AFFECTIONATE COUSIN

DEDICATION

1899

TIME, lord of things and men, is yet no God,
Holds yet no rule but over night and day.
His viewless feet, with silence winged and shod,
Crush down all flowers and thorns on life's veiled
way,
All hopes and fears that change of chance might
sway,
But not one thought of love's or memory's ; none
That ever lived found ever life undone
By force of years that pass before the sun.

Love, life, and memory, higher than hope or fear,
Shine through the star of dawn and eve, and make
Evening as morning ; nor may grief not hear
Above the graves that sleep the songs that wake,
The music made of thought, for love's sweet sake
Singing ; the past that is not overpast,
But present here and future. Love holds fast
Time, and life lightens even from death at last.

Even out of death and sorrow life and joy
Requicken, as the soul casts off her chain,
And lights anew the life of girl and boy
Whose childhood lived and died not all in vain,
Though now their old young years be shed like rain

From time's lit cloud on life's resurgent sea
Whose tidestream whelms and wrecks all dreams
that flee,
All joy that was and might not think to be.

Love, death, and life, revealed of time as one,
Shine hand in hand above us. Age and youth
Are one before them even as they, where none
Sees, hopes, or loves aught else but only truth.
Not fear's keen fang nor doubt the serpent's tooth
Hath any power upon the soul whose wing
Soars higher than fear may climb or doubt may cling
And heeds not if there be so vain a thing.

How good was youth love smiles to think, nor grieves
With aught of base immedicable grief
If April flowers keep time with autumn leaves,
Albeit the date of each alike be brief.
The roseleaf dropt upon the lily-leaf
Gives love no sign of mourning. Nought is dead
While nought is yet forgotten : days now fled
Shine on the soul as dawn from sunset shed.

Scarce less in love than brother and sister born,
Even all save sister and brother sealed at birth,
Change hath not changed us so that cold-eyed scorn
Should bid remembrance hold of little worth
The lowliest flower whose roots keep hold on earth,
The unworthiest gift that man might think to give,
Remembering days that lived and died and live
And die not, and are found not fugitive.

The life that song or story sheds on death
Lights it as lightning, whence the shuddering sky

Shrinks, laughs, and pants with palpitating breath,
And shows the highest of heaven more heavenly
high.

The shades that here my song bids live and die
Lived, loved, and hated, when the skies were torn
By crossing fires of midnight and of morn
Whence darkness fled not, nor might day be born.

Love knew not if his name were hate or no,
Faith knew not if her hope were mad or wise.
An empire high as heaven on earth lay low,
And none might say what light should fall or rise
Beneath the abyss of storm-divided skies.
Wild wrath and wild-eyed love were twain and one
Before the sovereign silence of the sun
That saw them reign and saw their reign undone.

June, high in heaven, beheld their deadly play
Cast lots for life or death : and June, supreme
In power that made of night one fire with day,
Saw these their shadows rise and live, and seem
To speak and smite in life's requickening dream.
And now this latter June is likewise cast
Forth, and made one with all the fiery past,
Take what it gave—the firstfruits and the last.

PERSONS REPRESENTED

ALBOVINE, *King of the Lombards.*

ALMACHILDES, *a young Lombard warrior.*

NARSETES, *an old leader and counsellor.*

ROSAMUND, *Queen of the Lombards.*

HILDEGARD, *a noble Lombard maiden.*

Scene, VERONA.

Time, June 573.

ACT I

A hall in the Palace : a curtain drawn midway across it

Enter ALBOVINE and NARSETES

ALBOVINE

This is no matter of the wars : in war
Thy king, old friend, is less than king of thine,
And comrade less than follower. Hast thou loved
Ever—loved woman, not as chance may love,
But as thou hast loved thy sword or friend—or me?
Thou hast shown me love more stout of heart than
death.

Death quailed before thee when thou gav'st me life,
Borne down in battle.

NARSETES

Woman? As I love
Flowers in their season. A rose is but a rose.

ALBOVINE

Dost thou know rose from thistle or bindweed? Men,
Speak as our north wind speaks, harsh and hard--
Truth.

NARSETES

White I know from red, and dark from bright,
And milk from blood in hawthorn-flowers : but not
Woman from woman.

ALBOVINE

How should God our Lord,
Except his eye see further than his world ?
For women ever make themselves anew,
Meseems, to match and mock the maker. Friend,
If ever I were friend of thine in fight,
Speak, and I bid thee not speak truth : I know
Thy tongue knows nought but truth or silence.

NARSETES

Is it
A king's or friend's part, king, to bid his friend
Speak what he knows not ? Speak then thou, that I
May find thy will and answer it.

ALBOVINE

I am fain
And loth to tell thee how it wrings my heart
That now this hard-eyed heavy southern sun
Hath wrought its will upon us all a year
And yet I know not if my wife be mine.

NARSETES

Thy meanest man at arms had known ere dawn
Blinked on his bridal birthday.

ALBOVINE

Did I bid thee
Mock, and forget me for thy friend—I say not,
King? Is thy heart so light and lean a thing,
So loose in faith and faint in love? I bade thee
Stand to me, help me, hold my hand in thine
And give my heart back answer. This it is,
Old friend and fool, that gnaws my life in twain—
The worm that writhes and feeds about my heart—
The devil and God are crying in either ear
One murderous word for ever, night and day,
Dark day and deadly night and deadly day,
Can she love thee who slewest her father? I
Love her.

NARSETES

Thy wife should love thee as thy sire's
Loved him. Thou art worth a woman—heart for
heart.

ALBOVINE

My sire's wife loved him? Hers he had not slain.
Would God I might but die and burn in hell
And know my love had loved me!

NARSETES

Is thy name
Babe? Sweet are babes as flowers that wed the sun,
But man may be not born a babe again,
And less than man may woman. Rosamund
Stands radiant now in royal pride of place
As wife of thine and queen of Lombards—not

Cunimund's daughter. Hadst thou slain her sire
Shamefully, shame were thine to have sought her hand
And shame were hers to love thee : but he died
Manfully, by thy mightier hand than his
Manfully mastered. War, born blind as fire,
Fed not as fire upon her : many a maid
As royal dies disrobed of all but shame
And even to death burnt up for shame's sake : she
Lives, by thy grace, imperial.

ALBOVINE

He or I,
Her lord or sire, which hath most part in her,
This hour shall try between us.

Enter ROSAMUND

ROSAMUND

Royal lord,
Thy wedded handmaid craves of thee a grace.

ALBOVINE

My sovereign bids her bondman what she will.

ROSAMUND

I bid thee mock me not : I may ask thee
Aught, and be heard of any save my lord.

ALBOVINE

Go, friend. [*Exit NARSETES.*]
Speak now. Say first what ails thee ?

ROSAMUND

Me?

ALBOVINE

Thy voice was honey-hearted music, sweet
As wine and glad as clarions : not in battle
Might man have more of joy than I to hear it
And feel delight dance in my heart and laugh
Too loud for hearing save its own. Thou rose,
Why did God give thee more than all thy kin
Whose pride is perfume only and colour, this ?
Music ? No rose but mine sings, and the birds
Hush all their hearts to hearken. Dost thou hear not
How heavy sounds her note now ?

ROSAMUND

Sire, not I.

But sire I should not call thee.

ALBOVINE

Surely, no.

I bade thee speak : I did not bid thee sing :
Thou canst not speak and sing not.

ROSAMUND

Albovine,

I had at heart a simple thing to crave
And thought not on thy flatteries—as I think not
Now. Knowest thou not my handmaid Hildegard
Free-born, a noble maiden ?

ALBOVINE

And a fair
As ever shone like sundawn on the snows.

ROSAMUND

I had at heart to plead for her with thee.

ALBOVINE

Plead ? hast thou found her noble maidenhood
Ignobly turned unmaidenlike ? I may not
Lightly believe it.

ROSAMUND

Believe it not at all.
Wouldst thou think shame of me—lightly ? She loves
As might a maid whose kin were northern gods
The fairest-faced of warriors Lombard born,
Thine Almachildes.

ALBOVINE

If he loves not her,
More fool is he than warrior even, though war
Have wakened laughter in his eyes, and left
His golden hair fresh gilded, when his hand
Had won the crown that clasps a boy's brows close
With first-born sign of battle.

ROSAMUND

No such fool
May live in such a warrior ; if he love not

Some loveliness not hers. No face as bright
Crowned with so fair a Mayflower crown of praise
Lacked ever yet love, if its eyes were set
With all their soul to loveward.

ALBOVINE

Ay?

ROSAMUND

I know not
A man so fair of face. I like him well.
And well he hath served and loves thee.

ALBOVINE

Ay? The boy
Seems winsome then with women.

ROSAMUND

Hildegard
Hath hearkened when he spake of love—it may be,
Lightly.

ALBOVINE

To her shall no man lightly speak.
Thy maiden and our natural kin is she.
Wilt thou speak with him—lightly?

ROSAMUND

If thou wilt,
Gladly.

ALBOVINE

The boy shall wait upon thy will. [*Exit.*

ROSAMUND

My heart is heavier than this heat that weighs
With all the weight of June on us. I know not
Why. And the feast is close on us. I would
This night were now to-morrow morn. I know not
Why.

Enter ALMACHILDES

Ah! What would you?

ALMACHILDES

Queen, our lord the king
Bade me before thee hither.

ROSAMUND

Truth : I know it.
Thou art loved and honoured of our lord the king.
Dost thou, whom honour loves before thy time,
Love?

ALMACHILDES

Ay : thy noble handmaid, Hildegard.
I know not if she love me.

ROSAMUND

Thou shalt know.
But this thou knowest : I may not give thee her.

ALMACHILDES

I would not take her from the Lord God's hand
If hers were given against her will to mine.

ROSAMUND

A man said that : a manfuller than men
Who grip the loveless hands of prisoners. Well
It must be with the bride whose happier hand
Lies fond and fast in thine. Our Hildegard,
Being free and noble as Albovine and we,
Born one with us in race and blood, and thence
Our equal in our sole nobility,
Must well be won by noble works, and love
Whose light is one with honour's.

ALMACHILDES

Queen, may I
Perchance not win it? I know not.

ROSAMUND

Nay, nor I.
Soon may we know ; they are entering toward the
feast.

[*The curtain drawn discovers a banquet, with
guests assembled : among them NARSETES
and HILDEGARD.*

Re-enter ALBOVINE

ALBOVINE

Thine hand : I hold the whitest in the world.
Sit thou, boy, there, beside sweet Hildegard.

[*They sit.*
Bring me the cup. Queen, thou shalt pledge with me
A health to all this kingdom and its weal

Even from the bowl that here to hold in hand
Assures me lord of Lombardy and thine
By right and might of battle and of God—
The skull that was thy father's : so shalt thou
Drink to me with thy father.

ROSAMUND

Sire, my lord,
The life my sire, who gave thee up his life,
Gave me, and fostered till thou hadst given him
death,
Is all now thine. Thy will be done. I drink
To thee, who art all this kingdom and its weal,
All health and honour that of right should be,
With all good things I wish thee. [*Drinks.*]

ALBOVINE

Wish me well,
And God must give me what thou wilt. Good
friends,
My warriors and my brethren, hath not he
Given me to wife the best one born of man
And loveliest, and most loving? Silent, sirs?
Wherefore?

ROSAMUND

Thou shouldst not ask it. Bid the cup
Go blithely round.

ALBOVINE

By Christ and Thor, it shall.
What ails the boy there? Almachildes!

ALMACHILDES

King,

Nought ails me.

ALBOVINE

Nor thy maiden ?

ALMACHILDES

King, nor her.

ALBOVINE

Fall then to feasting. Bear the cup away.
Some savour of the dust of death comes from it.
Sweet, be not wroth nor sad.

ROSAMUND

I am blithe and fain,
Sire ; and I loved thee never more than now.

ALBOVINE

Nor ever I thee. Now I find thee mine,
And now no daughter of mine enemy's.

ROSAMUND

No.

Thou hast no enemy left on earth alive—
No soul unslain that hates thee.

ALBOVINE

That were much.
What man may say it ? and least of all may kings.

ROSAMUND

What hast thou done that man should hate thee—
man
Or woman?

ALBOVINE

Which of us may answer, Nought?

ROSAMUND

Thou might'st have made me—me, my father's
child—
Harlot and slave: thou hast made me wife and queen.

ALBOVINE

Thee have I loved; ay, and myself in thee,
Who hast made me more than king and lord, being
thine.

ROSAMUND

Courtesy sets on kings a goldener crown
That sits upon them seemlier.

ALBOVINE

Courtesy!
Truth. Hark thee, boy, and let thy Hildegard
Hearken. Is she, thy queen, a peer of mine?

ALMACHILDES

She wears no crown but heaven's about her head—
No gold that was not born upon her brows

Transfigures or disfigures them. She is not
A peer of thine.

ROSAMUND

He answers well.

ALBOVINE

He answers
Ill—as the spirit of shamelessness might speak.

ALMACHILDES

Shameless are they that lie. I lie not.

ALBOVINE

Boy,
Tempt not the rod.

ALMACHILDES

The rod that man may wield
No man may fear : the slave who fears it is not
Man.

ALBOVINE

Art thou crazed with wine ?

ALMACHILDES

Am I thy king ?

ALBOVINE

My thrall thou knowest thou art not, or thy tongue
Durst challenge not mine anger.

ROSAMUND

Thrall and free,
Woman and man, yea, queen and king, are born
More wide apart than earth or hell and heaven.
Sirs, let no wrangling breath distune the peace
That shines and glows about us, and discerns
A banquet from a battle. Thou, my lord,
Hast bidden away the dust of death which fell
Between us at thy bidding, and is now
Nothing—a dream blown out at waking. Thou,
My lord's young chosen of warriors, be not wroth,
Albeit thy wrath be noble, though my lord
See fit to try my love as gold is tried
By fire : it burns not thee. Strike hand in hand :
Ye have done so after battle.

ALBOVINE

Drink again.

I pledge thee, boy.

ALMACHILDES

I pledge thee, king.

ROSAMUND

My lord,
I am weary at heart, and fain would sleep. Forgive
me
That I can sit no more.

ALBOVINE

What ails thee ?

ROSAMUND

Nought.

The hot and heavy time of year has bound
About my brows a band of iron. Sire,
Thou wouldst not see me sink aswoon, and mar
The raptures of thy revel.

ALBOVINE

Get thee hence.

Go. God be with thee.

ROSAMUND

God abide with thee.

[Exit with attendants.]

ALBOVINE

This is no feast: I will no more of it. Boy,
Take note, and tempt not so thy bride, albeit
She tempt thee to the trial.

ALMACHILDES

I shall not, king.

ALBOVINE

She will not. Sirs, good night—if night may be
Good. Hardly may the day be, here. And yet
For you it may be—Hildegard and thee.
God give you joy.

ALMACHILDES

God give thee comfort, king.

[Exeunt.]

ACT II

A room in the Queen's apartments

Enter ROSAMUND

ROSAMUND

I am yet alive to question if I live
And wonder what may ever bid me die.
But live I will, being yet not dead with thee,
Father. Thou knowest in Paradise my heart.
I feel thy kisses breathing on my lips,
Whereto the dead cold relic of thy face
Was pressed at bidding of thy slayer last night,
And yet they were not withered: nay, they are red
As blood is—blood but newly spilt—not thine.
How good thou wast and sweet of spirit—how dear,
Father! None lives that knew thee now save one,
And none loves me but thou nor thee but I,
That was till yesternight thy daughter: now
That very name is tainted, and my tongue
Tastes poison as I speak it. There is nought
Left in the range and record of the world
For me that is not poisoned: even my heart
Is all envenomed in me. Death is life,
Or priesthood lies that swears it: then I give

The man my husband and thy homicide
Life, if I slay him—the life he gave thee.

Enter HILDEGARD

Girl,
I sent for thee, I think : stand near me. Child,
Thou art fairer than thou knowest, I doubt : thou
art fair
As the awless maidenhood of morning : truth
Should live upon thy lips, though truth were dead
On all men's tongues and women's born save thine.
Dawn lies not when it laughs on us. Thy queen
I am not now : thy friend I would be. Tell
Thy friend if love sleep or awake in thee
Toward any man. Thou art silent. Tell me this,
Dost thou not think, where thought scarce knows
itself—
Think in the subtle sense too deep for thought—
That Almachildes loves thee ?

HILDEGARD

More than I
Love Almachildes.

ROSAMUND

Thus a maid should speak.
Dost thou love me ?

HILDEGARD

Thou knowest it, queen.

ROSAMUND

It lies

Now in thy power to show me more of love
Than ever yet hath man or woman. Swear,
If thou dost love me, thou wilt show it.

HILDEGARD

I swear.

ROSAMUND

By all our fathers' great forsaken gods
Who smiled on all their battles, and by him
Who clomb or crept or leapt upon their throne
And signed us Christian, swear it, then.

HILDEGARD

I swear.

ROSAMUND

What if I bid thee give thyself to shame—
Yield up thy soul and body—play such parts
As shameless fame records of women crowned
Imperial in the tale of lust and Rome?

HILDEGARD

Thou couldst not bid me do it.

ROSAMUND

Thou hast sworn.

HILDEGARD

I have sworn.

Queen, I would do it, and die.

ROSAMUND

Thou shalt not. Yet
This must thou do, and live. Thou shalt not be
Shamed. Thou shalt bid thine Almachildes come
And speak with thee by nightfall. Say, the queen
Will give not up the maiden so beloved
—And truth it is, I love thee—willingly
To the arms of one her husband loves : but were it
Shame, utter shame, that he should wed not her,
The shamefast queen could choose not. Then shall he
Plead. Then shalt thou turn gentler than the snow
That softens at the strong sun's kiss, and yield.
But needs must night be close about your love
And darkness whet your kisses. Light were death.
Hast thou no heart to guess now? Fear not then.
Not thou but I must put on shame. I lack
A hand for mine to grasp and strike with. His
I have chosen.

HILDEGARD

I see but as by lightning. Queen,
What should I do but warn the king—or him?

ROSAMUND

Thou hast sworn. I hold thee by thy word.

HILDEGARD

Help me !

My Christ,

ROSAMUND

No God can break thine oath in twain
And leave thee less than perjured. Thou must bid him
Make thee to-night his bride.

HILDEGARD

I could not say it.

ROSAMUND

Thou shalt, or God shall smite thee down to hell.
What, art thou godless?

HILDEGARD

Art not thou?

ROSAMUND

Not I.

I find him just and gracious, girl : he gives me
My right by might set fast on thine and thee.

HILDEGARD

For love of mercy, queen—for honour's sake,
Bid me not shame myself before a man—
The man I love—who gives me back at least
Honour, if love he gives not.

ROSAMUND

Ay, my maid?

And yet he loves thee, or thy maiden thought
Errs with no gracious error, more than thou
Him?

HILDEGARD

Art thou woman born, to cast me back
My maiden shame for shame upon my face?
I would not say I loved him more than man
Loved ever woman since the light of love
Lit them alive together. Let us be.

ROSAMUND

I will not. Mine are both by God's own gift.
I will not cast it from me. Ye may live
Hereafter happy : never now shall I.

HILDEGARD

Have mercy. Nay, I cannot do it. And thou,
Albeit thine heart be hot with hate as hell,
Couldst say not, nor fold round with fairer speech,
Those foul three words the Egyptian woman said
Who tempted and could tempt not Joseph.

ROSAMUND

No.

He would not hearken. Joseph loved not her
More than thine Almachildes me. But thou
Shalt. Now no more may I debate with thee.
Go.

HILDEGARD

God requite thee !

ROSAMUND

That shall he and I,
Not thou, make proof of. If I plead with him,

I crave of God but wrong's requital. Go.

[*Exit* HILDEGARD.]

And yet, God help me! Can I do it? God's will
May no man thwart, or leave his righteousness
Baffled. I would not say, 'My will be done,'
Were God's will not for righteousness as mine,
If right be righteous, wrong be wrong, must be.
How else may God work wrong's requital? I
Must be or none may be his minister.
And yet what righteousness is his to cast
Athwart my way toward right this wrong to me,
A sin against the soul and honour? Why
Must this vile word of *yet* cross all my thought
Always, a drifting doom or doubt that still
Strikes up and floats against my purpose? God,
Help me to know it! This weapon chosen of me,
This Almachildes, were his face not fair,
Were not his fame bright—were his aspect foul,
His name dishonourable, his line through life
A loathing and a spitting-stock for scorn,
Could I do this? Am I then even as they
Who queened it once in Rome's abhorrent face
An empress each, and each by right of sin
Prostitute? All the life I have lived or loved
Hath been, if snows or seas or wellsprings be,
Pure as the spirit of love toward heaven is—chaste
As children's eyes or mothers'. Though I sinned
As yet my soul hath sinned not, Albovine
Must bear, if God abhor unrighteousness,
The weight of penance heaviest laid on sin,
Shame. Not on me may shame be set, though hell
Take hold upon me dying. I would the deed
Were done, the wreak of wrath were wroken, and I
Dead.

Enter ALBOVINE

ALBOVINE

Art thou sick at heart to see me ?

ROSAMUND

No.

ALBOVINE

Thou art sweet and wise as ever God hath made
Woman. I would not turn thine heart from me
Or set thy spirit against the sense of mine
For more than Rome's old empire.

ROSAMUND

That, albeit
Thou wouldst, be sure thou canst not. God nor man
Could wake within me toward my lord the king
A new strange love or loathing. Fear not this.

ALBOVINE

From thee can I fear nothing. Now I know
How high thy heart is, and how true to me.

ROSAMUND

Thou knowest it now.

ALBOVINE

I know not if I should
Repent me, or repent not, that I tried
A heart so high so sorely—proved so true.

ROSAMUND

Do not repent. I would not have thee now
Repent.

ALBOVINE

By Christ, if God forbade it not,
I would have said within mine own fool's heart,
Of all vile things that fool the soul of man
The vilest and the priestliest hath to name
Repentance. Could it blot one hour's work out,
A wise thing and a manful thing it were,
And profit were it none for priests to preach.
This will I tell thee : what last night befell
Rejoices not but irks me.

ROSAMUND

Let it not
Rejoice nor irk thee. Vex thou not thy soul
With any thought thereon, if none may bid thee
Rejoice : and that were harsh and hard of heart.

ALBOVINE

I will not. Queen and wife, hell durst not say
I do not love thee.

ROSAMUND

Heaven has heard—and I.

ALBOVINE

Forget then all this foolishness, and pray
God may forget it.

ROSAMUND

God forgets as I. [*Exit* ALBOVINE.
And had repentance helped him? Shall I think
It might have molten in my burning heart
The thrice-retempered iron of resolve?
Yet well it is to know that penitence
Lies further from that frozen heart of his
Than mercy from the tiger's. Ay, God knows,
I had scorned him too had penitence bowed him down
Before me: now I do but hate. I am not
Abased as wholly, so supremely shamed,
As though I had wedded one as hard as he
Who yet might think to soften down with words
What hardly might be cleansed with tears of blood,
The monumental memory graven on steel
That burns the naked spirit of sense within me
Like the ardent sting of keen-edged ice, which makes
The naked flesh feel fire upon it.

Enter ALMACHILDES

ALMACHILDES

Queen,
I come to crave a word of thee.

ROSAMUND

I hear.

ALMACHILDES

Thou knowest I love thy noble Hildegard:
And rather would I give my soul to burn

Than wrong in thought her flawless maidenhood.
And now she hath told me what I dare not think
Truth. And I dare not think her lips may lie.

ROSAMUND

I have heard. And what is this to me? She hath
not
Said—hath not told thee, nor wouldst thou believe—
That I have breathed a lie upon her lips
Or taught them shamelessness by lesson?

ALMACHILDES

No.

But she came forth from thee to me—from thee—
And spake with quivering mouth and quailing eyes
And face whose fire turned ashen, and again
Rekindling from that ashen agony
Flamed, what no heart could think to hear her speak,
Mine least of all, who love her.

ROSAMUND

Ay?

ALMACHILDES

Not she,

I know it as sure as night is known from day
And surelier than I know mine own soul's truth,
Spake what she spake in broken bursts of breath
Out of her own heart and its love for me.

ROSAMUND

Didst thou so answer her?

ALMACHILDES

I might not well

Answer at all.

ROSAMUND

Poor maid, she hath loved amiss.
Belike she thought to find in thee a man's
Love.

ALMACHILDES

That she hath found ; nought meaner than a man's ;
No wolfish lust of ravenous insolence
To soil and spoil her of her noblest name.

ROSAMUND

I do not ask thee what she said. I know.

ALMACHILDES

I knew thou didst.

ROSAMUND

To make your bridal sure
She bade thee make thy bride of her to-night.

ALMACHILDES

She bade me as a slave might bid the scourge
Fall.

ROSAMUND

Such a scourge no slave might shrink from ; nay,
No free-born woman, Almachildes.

ALMACHILDES

Queen,

I crave thy queenly mercy though I say
My maid, my bride that will be, shrank, and showed
In all the rosebright anguish of her face
A shuddering shame that wrung my heart. And thou
Hast surely set thereon that seal of shame.
I know it as thou dost.

ROSAMUND

Ay, and more she said,
Surely : she said I would not yield her up
To the arms of one my husband loves and holds
Honoured at heart—I hate my husband so,
She told thee—were the need avoidable
Save by her sacrifice to shame.

ALMACHILDES

Thou knowest

All, as I knew, and lacked not from thy lips
Confession.

ROSAMUND

Warrior though thou be, and boy
Though my lord call thee, brainless art thou not—
No sword with man's face carven on the heft
For mockery more than truth or help in fight.
I do not and I durst not play with thee.
Thy bride spake truth : I knew not she might need
So much of truth to tempt thee toward her. Now
Thou knowest, and I know. If this imminent night

Make not thy darkling bride of her, by day
Thy bride she may be never. She hath sworn.

ALMACHILDES

Why wouldst thou shame her ?

ROSAMUND

Shamed she cannot be
If thou be found not shameless. Plead no more
Against thine own love's surety. Doubt thou not
I wish thee well, and love her. Make not thou
Out of her shamefast maidenhood and fear
A sword to cleave your happiness in twain.
What if some oath constrain me, sworn in haste,
Infrangible for shame's sake, sealed in heaven
Inevitable? Ask now no more of me.
Nightfall is here upon us. Nought on earth
May set the season of your bridal back
If thou be true as she must. Wait awhile
Here till a sign be sent thee—till a bell
Strike softly from this chamber here at hand.
I have sworn to her she shall not see thy face,
So sore she prayed she might not : and for thee
I swore that ere the darkling air grew grey
Thou shouldst arise and leave her, and behold
Thy midnight bride but when thou art bidden again
To meet her here to-morrow. Strange it were,
More strange than aught of all, that thou shouldst
prove
Dishonourable : and except thou be, these things
Must all be wrought in this wise, lest her oath
And mine, at peril of her soul and life,
By passionate forgetfulness of thine

Disloyally be broken. Swear to us now
Thou wilt not break our oath and thine, or think
To look to-night upon thy bride.

ALMACHILDES

I swear.

ROSAMUND

I take thine oath. I bid not thee take heed
That I or thou or each of us at once,
Couldst thou play false, may die : I bid thee think
Thy bride will die, shamed. Swear me not again
She shall not : all our trust is set on thee.
What eyes and ears are keen about us here
Thou knowest not. Love, my love and thine for her,
Shall deafen and shall blind them. Be but thou
A bridegroom blind and dumb—speak soft as love,
And ask not answer louder than a sigh—
And when to-morrow sets thy bride and thee
Here face to face again, thy soul shall stand
Amazed : thy joy shall turn to wonder. This
Thy queen, whose power may seal her promise fast,
Swears for thine oath again to thee. Good night.
[Exit.]

ALMACHILDES

I cannot think I live. Our Sigurd loved not
Brynhild as I love her, and even this hour
Shall make us great as they. No spell to break,
No fire to pass, divides us. Blind and dumb,
Love knows, would I be ever while I live
For love's sake rather than forego the joy
That makes one godlike power of spirit and sense,

One godhead born of manhood. God requite
The queen who loves my love and cares for me
Thus! How may man or God requite her? Ah!
[*Bell rings softly from within.*
There sounds the note that opens heaven on me,
And how should man dare heaven? But love may
dare. [*Exit.*

ACT III

*An eastward room in the Palace**Enter ALBOVINE*

ALBOVINE

This sun—no sun like ours—burns out my soul.
I would, when June takes hold on us like fire,
The wind could waft and whirl us northward : here
The splendour and the sweetness of the world
Eat out all joy of life or manhood. Earth
Is here too hard on heaven—the Italian air
Too bright to breathe, as fire, its next of kin,
Too keen to handle. God, whoe'er God be,
Keep us from withering as the lords of Rome—
Slackening and sickening toward the imperious end
That wiped them out of empire ! Yea, he shall.

Enter HILDEGARD

HILDEGARD

The queen would wait upon your majesty.

ALBOVINE

Bid her come in. And tell her ere she come
I wait upon her will. *[Exit HILDEGARD.]*
What would she now ?

Enter ROSAMUND

By Christ, how fair thou art ! I never saw thee
So like the sun in heaven : no rose on earth
Might think to match thee.

ROSAMUND

All I am is thine.

ALBOVINE

Mine ? God might come from heaven to worship
thee.
Thine eyes outlighten all the stars : thy face
Leaves earth no flower to worship.

ROSAMUND

How should earth
Worship her children ? Nought it is in me,
My lord's dear love it is, that makes me seem
Fair.

ALBOVINE

How thou liest thou knowest not. Rosamund,
What hast thou done to be so beautiful ?

ROSAMUND

The sun has left thine eyes half blind.

ALBOVINE

I dare not
Kiss thee, or stare straight-eyed against the sun.

ROSAMUND

Kiss me. Who knows how long the lord of life
May spare us time for kissing? Life and love
Are less than change and death.

ALBOVINE

What ghosts are they?
So sweet thou never wast to me before.
The woman that is God—the God that is
Woman—the sovereign of the soul of man,
Our fathers' Freia, Venus crowned in Rome,
Has lent my love her girdle ; but her lips
Have robbed the red rose of its heart, and left
No glory for the flower beyond all flowers
To bid the spring be glad of.

ROSAMUND

Summer and spring
May cleanse and heal the heart of man no more
Than winter may, or withering autumn. Sire,
Husband and lord, I have a woful word
To speak against a man beloved of thee,
A man well worth all glory man may give—
Against thine Almachildes.

ALBOVINE

Has the boy
Transgressed again in awless heat of speech

And kindled wrath in thee against him—thee,
Who stood'st between my wrath and him?

ROSAMUND

I would
His were no more transgression than of speech.
He hath wronged—I bid thee ask of me no more—
A noble maiden. Till her shame be healed,
Her name is dead upon my lips and his,
Who is yet not all ignoble.

ALBOVINE

He shall die
Except he wed her, and she will to wed.

ROSAMUND

That surely will she.

ALBOVINE

Bid him hither.

ROSAMUND

See,
There strides he through the sunshine toward the
shade.
How light and high he steps! He sees thee. Bid
him—
Beckon him in.

ALBOVINE

He knows mine eye. He comes.

ROSAMUND

Obedient as a hound is.

ALBOVINE

As a man
That knows the law of loyal manhood.

ROSAMUND

Ay?

God send it be so.

Enter ALMACHILDES

ALMACHILDES

Queen and king, I am here.
What would you?

ALBOVINE

Truth. Hast thou not borne thyself
Toward any soul on earth disloyally
Ever?

ALMACHILDES

Never.

ALBOVINE

I would not say thou liest.

ALMACHILDES

Do not : the lie should burn thy lips up, king.

ALBOVINE

Thou hast wrought no wrong toward man or
woman?

ALMACHILDES

None.

ALBOVINE

Speak thou : thou hast heard him answer me.

ROSAMUND

I have heard.

No wrong it may be with the serfs of hell
To cast upon a woman for a curse
Shame : to defile the spirit and shrine of love,
Put out the sunlike eyes of maidenhood
And leave the soul dismantled. Has not he
So sinned?—Hast thou wrought no such work as
this?
The king has heard thy silence.

ALMACHILDES

Queen and king,
I have done no wrong, but right. I have chosen my
bride,
And made her mine by gentle grace of hers
Lest wrong should come between us. Now no man
May think to unwed us : king nor queen may cross
This wedded love of ours : no thwart or stay
May sunder us till heaven and earth turn hell.

ALBOVINE

I deemed not thee dishonourable : and thy queen
Now knows thee true as I did. Rosamund,
Forgive and give him back his bride.

ROSAMUND

I will,
King.

ALBOVINE

Boy, thy queen hath shown thee grace ; be thou
Thankful. I leave thee here to yield her thanks.

[Exit.]

ALMACHILDES

Queen, I would die to serve and thank thee.

ROSAMUND

Die ?

So young and glad and glorious ? Thou shalt not
Die. Was thy bride's face bright to look upon
When last night's moon and stars illumined it ?

ALMACHILDES

Thou knowest I might not look upon it.

ROSAMUND

No.

Thou hast never loved before ?

ALMACHILDES

I have loathed, not loved,
The loveless harlots clasped of all the camp :
I have followed wars and visions all my days
Even till my love's eyes lit and stung to life
The soul within my body. Till I loved,
I knew not woman.

ROSAMUND

Now thou knowest. This love
Is no good lord—no gentle god—no soft
Saviour. Thou knowest perchance thy bride's name
—hers
Whose body and soul were one but now with thine?

ALMACHILDES

How should not I? What darkling light is this
That burns and broods and lightens in thine eyes,
Queen?

ROSAMUND

Hildegard it was not.

ALMACHILDES

Art not thou—
Or am not I—sun-smitten through the brain
By this mad might of midsummer? Who was it
That slept or slept not with me while the night
Was more than noon and more than heaven? What
• name
Was hers who made me godlike?

ROSAMUND

Rosamund.

ALMACHILDES

Thine? was it thou? It was not.

ROSAMUND

It was I.

ALMACHILDES

Does the sun stand in heaven? Or stands it fast
As when God bade it halt on high? My life
Is broken in me.

ROSAMUND

Nay, fair sir, not yet.
Thy life is now mine—as the ring I wear
That seals my hand a wife's. Die thou shalt not,
But slay, and live.

ALMACHILDES

Slay whom?

ROSAMUND

Thy lord and mine.

ALMACHILDES

I had rather go down quick to hell.

ROSAMUND

I know it.
I leave thee not the choice. Keep thou thy hand

Bloodless, and Hildegard, whom yet I love,
Dies, and in fire, the harlot's death of shame.
Last night she lured thee hither. Hate of me,
Because of late I smote her, being in wrath
Forgetful of her noble maidenhood,
Stung her for shame's sake to take hands with shame.
This if I swear, may she unswear it? Thou
Canst not but say she bade thee seek her. She
Lives while I will, as Albovine and thou
Live by my grace and mercy. Live, or die.
But live thou shalt not longer than her death,
Her death by burning, if thou slay not him.
I see my death shine in thine eyes: I see
My present death inflame them. That were not
Her surety, Almachildes. Thou shouldst know me
Now. Though thou slay me, this may save not her.
My lines are laid about her life, and may not
By breach of mine be broken.

ALMACHILDES

God must be
Dead. Such a thing as thou could never else
Live.

ROSAMUND

That concerns not thee nor me. Be thou
Sure that my will and power to serve it live.
Lift now thine eyes to look upon thy lord.

Re-enter ALBOVINE

ALBOVINE

By this time hath he thanked thee not enough?

ROSAMUND

More hath he given than thanks.

ALBOVINE

What more may be?

ROSAMUND

His plighted faith to heal the wrong he wrought
Faithfully.'

ALBOVINE

Boy, strike then thy hand in mine.
Thou art loyal as I knew thee.

ALMACHILDES

King, I may not
Touch hands with thee.

ALBOVINE

Thou art false, then, ha? Thou hast lied?

ALMACHILDES

King, till the wrong I have wrought be wreaked or
healed
I clasp not hands with honour. Nay, and then
Perchance I may not.

ALBOVINE

Boy I called thee : child
I call thee now. But, boy, the child thou art
Is noble as our sires.

ALMACHILDES

Would God it were! [*Exit.*]

ALBOVINE

What ails him?

ROSAMUND

Love and shame.

ALBOVINE

No more than these?

ROSAMUND

Enough are they to darken death and life.

ALBOVINE

Thou art less than gentle towards his love and him.

ROSAMUND

I would not speak ungently. Her I love,
Poor child, and him I hate not.

ALBOVINE

Thou shalt live

To love him too.

ROSAMUND

This heaviness of heat
Kills love and hate and life in me. I know not
Aught lovesome save the sweet brief death of sleep.

ALBOVINE

I am weary as thou. Good night we may not say—
Good noon I bid thee. Sleep shall heal us.

ROSAMUND

Ay ;

No healing and no help for life on earth
Hath God or man found out save death and sleep.
[*Exeunt.*

ACT IV

*The same Scene**Enter ALMACHILDES and HILDEGARD*

HILDEGARD

Hast thou forgiven me?

ALMACHILDES

I have not forgiven

God.

HILDEGARD

Wilt thou slay thy soul and mine?

ALMACHILDES

Wilt thou

Madden me? God hath given us up to her
Who is deadlier than the fiery fang of death—
Us, innocent and loyal.

HILDEGARD

Nay, if I

Forgive her love of thee—though this be hard,
Canst thou forgive not?

ALMACHILDES

Sweet, for thee and me
Remains no rescue save by death or flight
From worse than flight or death is.

HILDEGARD

Worse is nought
But shame : and how may shame take hold on us,
On us who have sinned not ? Me she bound to play
thee
False, and betray thee to her arms : I might not
Choose, though my heart should rend itself in twain
And cleave with ravenous anguish : yet I live.
Vex not thy soul too sorely : me, not her,
Thy spirit embraced, thine arms and lips made thine
Me, not my darkling wraith, my changeling foe,
My thief of love, our traitress. This I bid thee,
Forget thy fear and shame to have wronged me :
night
Breeds treacherous dreams that can but poison day
If thought be found so base a fool as dares
Fear. Did I doubt thy love of me, I durst not
Live or look back upon thee.

ALMACHILDES

Wilt thou then
Fly ?

HILDEGARD

Dost thou know what flight means—thou ?
It means
Fear. And is fear a new-born friend of thine ?

ALMACHILDES

God help us ! if he live, and hate not man—
If Satan be not God. We will not fly.

Enter ALBOVINE and ROSAMUND

ALBOVINE

Fly? What should love at height of happiness
Or youth at height of honour fear and fly?
Would ye take wing for heaven? take shame on
earth
To wed in peace and honour?

ALMACHILDES

No, my king.

No, surely.

ROSAMUND

Weep not, maiden. Dost not thou,
Man, that we thought her bridegroom sealed of love,
Love her?

ALMACHILDES

No saint loved ever God as I
Her.

ROSAMUND

And betray her to shame thou wouldst not?
See,
My lord, the silent answer flash aloud
From cheek and eye a goodly witness. Thou,
My maiden, dost thou love not him? Nay, speak.

HILDEGARD

I cannot say it—I cannot strive to say.

ROSAMUND

Thou shalt. Are all we not fast bound in love—
My lord and thine, my maiden and her queen,
A fourfold chain of faith twice linked of love?
Speak: let not shame find place where shame is
none.

HILDEGARD

I will not. King and queen and God shall hear.
I love him as our songs of old time say
Men have been loved of women akin to gods
By blood as they by spirit, albeit in me
Nought lives that woman or man or God could say
Were worth his love, if mine by grace of love
Be found not all unworthy. Mine am I
No more: mine own in no wise now, but his
To save or slay, to cherish or cast out,
Crown and discrown, abase and comfort. Shame
Were more to me than honour if his will
It were that shame should clothe me round, and life
Were the only death left fearful if he bade me
Die. Could his love be turned from me, and set
On one less loving but more fair than I,
A thrall more base than treason or a queen
Too high for shame to brand her shameful, even
Though sin had stamped and signed her foul as
fraud
And loathsome as a masked adulterous lie,
Hers would I make him if I might, and yield

To her the hatefulest of hell-born things
The man found lovelier by my love than heaven.

ROSAMUND

Great love is this to brag of : great and strange.

HILDEGARD

Love is no braggart : lust and fraud and hate
Vaunt their vile strength when shame unveils them :
 love
Vaunts not itself. I spake not uncompelled,
And blushed not out the avowal.

ALBOVINE

Boy, I held
And hold thee noblest of my lords of war,
And worthier than thine elders born and tried
Ere battle found thee ripe and glad at heart
To stem and swim the tide of spears : but this
I know not if thou be or any man
Be worthy of.

ALMACHILDES

Of all men born on earth
I am most unworthy of it. None might be
Worthy.

ROSAMUND

He weeps : thy boy is humble.

ALMACHILDES

Queen,
I weep not. Shamed with no ignoble shame

Thou seest me : but I weep not. Yea, God knows,
Humbled I am, and humble ; not to thee.

ALBOVINE

Chafe not : and thou, queen though thou be, and
mine,
Tempt not a true man's wrath with words that bear
Fangs keener than thou knowest of.

ROSAMUND

King, henceforth,
Being warned, I will not. Dangerous as the sea
A true man's wrath is—and a true man's love :
A woman's hath no peril in it : her tears
Wash wrath and peril away.

ALBOVINE

I have never seen thee
Weep.

ROSAMUND

How should I weep—I, thy wife?

ALBOVINE

I have heard thee
Laugh ; and thy smiles were always bright as fire.

ROSAMUND

Well were it with me—ay, and reason found
For me to live and do the living world
Some service—could my husband warm thereat

His heart as winter-stricken hands in frost
Are warmed at winter fires.

ALBOVINE

No need, no need :
The sun thou art warms all our year with love,
And leaves no chill on winter.

ROSAMUND

Albovine,
Love now secludes us not from sight of man—
From sight of this my maiden and the man
Who shines but as the battle's boy for thee
But lives for me my maiden's lover—true
As truth is—Almachildes.

ALBOVINE

How thy lips
Hang lingering on his name as though 'twere thou
That loved him ! Thou shouldst love thy maiden
well.

ROSAMUND

As she loves me I love her. Hildegard,
Leave us. Thou knowest I love thee.

HILDEGARD

Queen, I know. [*Exit.*]

ALBOVINE

What ails the boy ? what rapturous agony
Torments and glorifies his glance at her

As with delight in torture? Cheer thee, man :
Thou art not thus all unworthy.

ROSAMUND

Spare him, king.
A king may guess not how a man's heart yearns
With all unkingly sense of love and shame
Not all unmanly.

ALBOVINE

Shame is none to be
Loved, and to deem that love exceeds our due
Who may not well deserve it. Sick at heart
He seems, and should be gladder than the sea
When wind and sun strike life in it.

ALMACHILDES

I am not
So stricken, king. I thank thy care of me.

ALBOVINE

Heart-stricken or shame-stricken art thou?

ROSAMUND

King,
Spare him. Thou knowest not love like his. It burns
And rends and wrings the spirit.

ALBOVINE

No. And thou,
Dost thou then?

ROSAMUND

Eyes and heart and sense are mine
As weak and strong as woman's can but be ;
As weak in strength and strong in weakness. Men,
Being wise, and mightier than their mates on earth,
Need no such knowledge born of inborn pain
As quickens all the spirit of sense in us.
Worms know what eagles know not.

ALBOVINE

Like enough.

Rede me no redes and riddles. Never yet
I have loved thee more, and yet I have loved thee
 well,
Than now that loving-kindness borne toward love
Makes thee so gracious, pleading for it.

ROSAMUND

Love

Sees all things lovely : thine, if praise there be,
Not mine the praise is : thee, not me, these twain
Must love and worship as their lord of love.

ALBOVINE

Well, God be good to them and thee and me !
I would this fierce Italian June were dead,
So hard it weighs upon me.

ROSAMUND

Now not long

Shall we sustain or sink aswoon from it :
It has but left a day or two to die.

ALBOVINE

And well were that, if summer died with June.
Two red months more must set on sense and soul
The branding-iron stamped of summer : nay,
The sea is here no sea to cherish man :
It brings no choral comfort back with tides
That surge and sink and swell and chime and change
And lighten life with music where the breath
Dies and revives of night and day.

ROSAMUND

Be thou
Content : a God hath driven us hither.

ALBOVINE

Yea :
A God of death and fire and strife, whose hand
Is heavy on my spirit. Be not ye
Troubled, if peace be with you. .

ROSAMUND

Peace to thee.
[Exit ALBOVINE.
Now follow : smite him now : thou art strong, but
yet
Thy king is stronger—mightier thewed than thou.
Thou couldst not slay him in fight.

ALMACHILDES

I cannot slay him
Thus.

ROSAMUND

Canst thou slay thy bride by fire? He dies,
Or she dies, bound against the stake. His death
Were the easier. Follow him : save her : strike but
once.

ALMACHILDES

I cannot. God requite thee this ! I will. [*Exit.*

ROSAMUND

And I will see it. And, father, thou shalt see.
[*Exit.*

ACT V

*The Banqueting-hall**Enter ALBOVINE and ROSAMUND*

ALBOVINE

This June makes babes of men ; last night I deemed
When thou hadst wished me peace as I passed forth
A footfall pressed behind me soft and fast,
And turning toward it I beheld nought : thee
I saw, and Almachildes hard at hand
Turned back toward thee : nought stranger : yet my
heart

Sprang, and sank back. I laughed against myself,
That manhood should be girlish, when the heat
Burns life half out within us. Even thine eyes,
Like stars before the wind that brings the cloud,
Look fainter. Ere they fill the banquet full
And bid the guests about us where we sit,
Tell me if aught be worse than well with thee.

ROSAMUND

Nought.

ALBOVINE

Wilt thou swear it, sweet ?

ROSAMUND

By what thou wilt—
By God and man—by hell and earth and heaven.
I know what ails thy loyal heart of love
And binds thy tongue for fear to bid me know.
The cup we drank of when we feasted last
Tastes bitter on it yet. Thou wilt not bid me
Pledge thee therein again. If I bid thee,
Pledge me thou shalt—and seal thy pardon.

ALBOVINE

Be not

Too sweet for woman.

ROSAMUND

Cross me not in this.

ALBOVINE

Mine old fast friend Narsetes hath my word
Plighted. All funeral reverence shall inter
The royal relic, and all thought therewith
Of strife between thy father's child and me
Or less than love and honour.

ROSAMUND

Nay, my lord,
Let the dead thing live as a lifelong sign

Of perfect plight in love and union. This
Were no dishonour done to fatherhood
But honour shown to wedlock. Here is spread
The feast, the bride-feast of my love and thine,
Whereat the cup of death shall serve our lips
To drink forgetfulness of all but love.
Herein thou shalt not thwart me.

ALBOVINE

God forbid.

ROSAMUND

God hath forbidden : and God shall be obeyed.
Bid thy Narsetes play the cup-bearer,
And I will pour the wine : my hand shall fill
The sacramental draught of love that seals
Our eucharist of wedlock.

ALBOVINE

Yea, I know
To drink with thee is even to drink with God.
Thou art good as any God was ever.

ROSAMUND

Ay?

We know not till we die.

ALBOVINE

Thou art wise and true
As ever maid was born of the oldworld north

In the oldworld years of legend. Bid Narsetes
Bring thee the chalice : thou shalt mix the draught
Whence we will drink life, if true love be life,
Even from the lipless mouth of bone that speaks
Death.

ROSAMUND

I will mix it well with honey and herb
Sweet as the mead our fathers drank, and dreamed
Their gods so drank in heaven—draughts deep and
strong
As life is strong and death is deep. I go
To bid Narsetes hither. [*Exit.*

ALBOVINE

Nay, by God,
Whoever God be, never Christ or Thor
Beheld or blessed a nobler wife, whose love
Was found through proof of purity by fire
More like our northern stars and snows and suns,
And sane in strong sufficiency of soul
As womanhood by godhead from the womb
Elected and exalted.

Enter NARSETES

NARSETES

King, thy wife
Hath given me back thy message given her.

ALBOVINE

Ay ?

And thou hast given her back my cup, then ?

NARSETES

King,

I have given it. Loth to give it if I were,
Ye know : she knows as thou : thou knowest as she.

ALBOVINE

What ails thee to distaste thy duty ? Man,
Thou shouldst be glad, being loyal. Knowest thou
not

Her will it was that we should pledge therein
To-night, this hour, our lifelong love, and seal it
More surely so than priest or prayer can seal ?

NARSETES

Her will it was, I know, not thine. I would
Thou hadst not yielded up to hers thy will.

ALBOVINE

Thou liest : I have not yielded it : I have given
Love, willing as the springtide sea gives up
Her will to the eastern sea-wind's.

NARSETES

Love should give

No more than love should crave of love : and this
Is such a gift as hate might crave of death
Or priests of God when angered.

ALBOVINE

Hark thee, man.

Thou art old, and when I loved thee first and found
thee

My lord and leader down the ways of war,
My master born by right of manfulness
And steersman through the surf of battle, time
Gaped as a gulf between us : sire and son
We might be : now I bid thee hold thy peace,
Lest all these memories perish, and their death
Give life more strong than theirs to wrath, and leave
thee

Shelterless as a waif of the air when storm
Drives bird and beast to deathward. What I bade
thee

I bid thee do, and leave me.

NARSETES

King, I go. [*Exit.*]

ALBOVINE

What, have I played the Berserk with my friend ?
So should not kings. What meant he ? Men wax
old,

And age eats out the natural sense of love
Which gives the soul sight of such nobler things
As trust may see by grace of truth more fair
Than doubt would fear to dream of. Rosamund
Knows more by might of faith and love than he.
And yet I would, and yet I would not, fool
As even in mine own eyes I am, she had not

Given me this proof, desired of me this sign,
How clear her soul is toward me save of love,
To attest her pardon of me. Would it were
Sunrise to-morrow !

Enter ALMACHILDES and HILDEGARD

Whence come these, to bring
Sunrise about me ? Nay, I bade you be
Here. Does thy memory too not fail thee, boy,
Burnt out by stress of summer ?

ALMACHILDES

No.

ALBOVINE

Nor hers ?

HILDEGARD

How might it, king ? Thou art good to us.

ALBOVINE

All things born
Seem good to lovers in their spring of love,
And all men should be. Maiden, God doth well
To give us foresight of the sight of heaven
By looking in such eyes as love like thine
Kindles and veils for love's sake. Fain was I
To see my boy's bride and her bridegroom here
Before the feast broke in on us, and bless
Their love with mine—if mine be blessing.

HILDEGARD

Sire,
As the earth gives thanks in spring for the April sun
I would and cannot yield you thanks for this.

ALMACHILDES

I cannot thank at all. I cannot thank
God.

ALBOVINE

Art thou mazed with love? For her thou
canst not
Thank God? What feverish doubt of love or life
Crazes or cramps thy spirit?

ALMACHILDES

I cannot say.
My heart, if any heart be left in me,
Is as it was not thankless : yet, my king,
I know not how to thank thee.

ALBOVINE

Thank me not :
I did not bid thee thank me. Love thy love,
And God be with you : so may God be found
Thankworthier. Keep some heart in thee awhile
For God's and her sake.

ALMACHILDES

All I may I will.

*Re-enter ROSAMUND, followed by NARSETES and
Guests*

ALBOVINE

Sit, friends and warriors : thou, my boy, next me,
And by my wife thy bride. This night, that leaves
But two days more for June to burn and live,
Plights with my queen's troth mine in life and death
This last one time for ever, in the cup
Whence none shall drink hereafter. Not in scorn,
Sirs, but in honour now the draught is pledged
Between us, ere this relic stand enshrined
And hallowed as a saint's on the altar. Queen,
I drink to thee.

ROSAMUND

I thank thee. Good Narsetes,
Give him the chalice. Women slain by fire
Thirst not as I to pledge thee.

*[As ALBOVINE is about to take the cup,
ALMACHILDES rises and stabs him.]*

ALBOVINE

Thou, my boy? *[Dies.]*

ROSAMUND

I. But he hears not. Now, my warrior guests,
I drink to the onward passage of his soul
Death. Had my hand turned coward or played me
false,
This man that is my hand, and less than I

And less than he bloodguilty, this my death
Had been my husband's : now he has left it me.

[*Drinks.*

How innocent are all but he and I
No time is mine to tell you. Truth shall tell.
I pardon thee, my husband : pardon me. [Dies.

NARSETES

Let none make moan. This doom is none of man's.

THE END.

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